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DON JOHN.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

DON JOHN

A Story

BY JEAN INGELOW

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London :

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON,

CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1881.

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DON JOHN.

CHAPTER I.

It may be doubted whether in all London there is, considering its width and the size of its houses, a more gloomy street than Upper Harley Street.

The houses in this fine street are too deep to be lighted well within ; and so high as to give it on a dull day very much the effect of an exceedingly long railway cutting between two high hills.

Some years ago, a very young woman in a widow's cap was furtively peeping out from an upper window in the front of one of these houses, and as she gazed down towards Cavendish Square and up towards Harley

Place she made the above comparison in her mind.

It was rather a dull day in the beginning of April, but she did not find the gloom of a London spring at all depressing, for she was sometimes allowed to take the baby now lying in a frilled bassinet behind her, into Oxford Street, where she could feast her eyes on the splendid contents of the shop windows, or she might stroll into the Soho bazaar, or she would be taken for a drive in the park with her charge by the baby's mother, for she was wet-nurse to the said baby, and thus found herself for the first time in her life a personage of great importance, whose tastes were to be consulted, whose dinner was by no means to be delayed, and whose comfort and even pleasure were considered to be of consequence.

To do her justice, she gave herself fewer airs than most of her class, and did her best for the baby, who was the child of a lawyer in excellent practice.

His name, the very same as that of his son, was Donald Johnstone ; he was of Scotch extraction, but his family had been for two generations settled in the South.

Maria Jane Aird, such was the name of the nurse, had been highly recommended to her present place ; and, in order to take it, had left her own young infant under the charge of her mother. But that she fretted after him now and then, she would have been thoroughly content ; she had not much loved the young husband whom, to please her mother, she had married. She was consoled now, for he had been already dead six months ; the main regret she still felt was that during his long illness (he was a carpenter) all his savings had been spent, so that she had nothing whereon to begin life again, and had even become familiar before the birth of her child with both want and cold.

She was a sweet-tempered young creature, had never done any particular good in the

world ; but then what opportunity had she found ? for the same reason possibly she had never done any particular harm.

She had one habit which Mrs. Johnstone, the baby's mother, did not like ; she was constantly reading books from a circulating library. Some of these were dirty, and smelt of tobacco ; Mrs. Johnstone had remarked more than once that she did not approve of books of that kind in the same room with the baby.

He was her only son, and a very precious infant ; everything that love and money could do was to be lavished on him. His three little sisters were in the country under the charge of an old servant, and just as Mrs. Aird withdrew her head and cautiously shut down the window, a boy with a telegram in his hand came up the street, containing a very important message concerning them. They were expected home that very afternoon, and their father was gone to fetch them.

Mrs. Aird, as she turned, looked about the

wide chamber, with that kind of exultation which comes of a fresh and advantageous change.

It was before the date when the browns we use on our wall papers began to be reverently studied from Thames mud, and the greens and yellows from mouldy cheese. No one as yet toned down tender dirty drab within to match the formless smoky drab without, no one adored rhubarb tints, or admired the colour resulting from mixtures of cocoa and milk.

The walls here were all one flush of comely cabbage roses making the most of themselves in quantities enough if they could have been gathered to fill several clothes' baskets. They sprawled quite innocent of artistic propriety over a paper satin-soft, and glossy, and in hue of a delicate dove-colour. There was gilding about certain picture-frames, and pink flutings and embroidered muslin draped the dressing-table. The baby, as a little god of love, was half smothered in lace frillings, his

little quilt was edged with swan's-down, and all his surroundings were enriched with fine needlework. All was gay and fresh and clean.

Mrs. Aird, hearing a step on the stairs, thrust away her novel, took up a piece of needlework, and at the same moment Mrs. Johnstone came in, looking very much flushed and agitated.

The nurse set a chair for her, but she was too restless to sit down. She had a telegram in her hand.

"This has just come from Mr. Johnstone," she said, "it is about the little girls, nurse."

"Indeed, ma'am."

"Mr. Johnstone telegraphed from Reading Station."

"Indeed, ma'am," repeated the nurse, "I hope there's nothing wrong?"

"I don't know, I hope not ; but he says my eldest little girl has a slight rash on her neck."

"Dear, ma'am !" exclaimed the nurse,

“don’t flurry yourself so ; consider how ill you have been. I dare say it’s nothing ; might I see the message ? ”

With a trembling hand Mrs. Johnstone held out the telegram. It ran thus :—

“ Have only just observed that Irene has a slight rash on her neck ; seems unwell, and is cross. Send baby into lodgings before we arrive. I hope nothing of consequence. If doctor says so, can have him back to-morrow.”

Upwards of twenty words ; how these gentle-folks throw away their money ! This was the nurse’s first thought ; after it crowded in others that nearly took her breath away.

“ I understand, I am told, Mrs. Aird, that your mother lives at Dartford, and has the care of your baby.”

“ Yes, ma’am ; it is a very nice clean place.”

“ Oh, I have of course no thought of sending you there for only one night.”

Mrs. Aird showed no disappointment in her face ; she only said,—

“ This handsome street and these squares about here never have any card up to show they let lodgings.”

“ Oh, no, no ; and there is so little time ; what can I do ? ”

“ There’s Kew ; is that far off, ma’am ? ”

“ Kew, yes, of course it is ; but why ? ”

“ I have a friend there, close to Kew Green, a very respectable woman that comes from the same place in Oxfordshire that my poor husband did, and she told me this very morning that an artist gentleman had just left her, and she wished she could hear of another *let*.”

“ I hope it would be only for a night,” mused the mother.

“ She is the cleanest woman that ever was,” urged the nurse, “ and I am sure she would not charge much.”

“ It would be sure to be for two nights,” thought Mrs. Aird. “ I can telegraph as well

as other people, and I might get a sight of my blessed baby."

"Ma'am, I would not deceive you for the world," she cried, the clear colour at a thought of this possibility flushing up all over her face and throat.

"You mean that this person is really clean and respectable?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And no other lodgers taken?"

"Oh no, ma'am, the house is too small for that."

"It is a healthy place?"

"Oh yes, close to the gardens."

"And in half an hour they will be here; ring the bell, Mrs. Aird."

"The baby is ready dressed to go out," proceeded the nurse as she rose.

"And the carriage," sighed the mother, "is already at the door."

It had been ordered in fact to take Mrs. Johnstone out.

"If I trust you for this one night," she

pleaded, "you will not leave my dear baby for a moment?"

"No, ma'am, it cuts me to the heart to see you so trembling. I would not, I assure you, as I am a Christian. But I'll be bound there's very little the matter with little miss; perhaps it's scarlatina she's got coming on, and all children must have that; the baby could not have it at a better time."

The sight of Mrs. Johnstone's nervous anxiety and changing colour wrung these words from the nurse almost in spite of herself, and though she longed to go; but the bell was soon answered by a housemaid who was told to help Mrs. Aird at once in packing the baby's clothes.

Mrs. Aird observed with excitement and joy that though the baby was to come back to-morrow, enough clothes were put up to last him at least a week. She herself was told to take a box of clothes with her, and in a very few minutes all was ready.

"I shall hope to drive over for you to-

morrow," said Mrs. Johnstone, and in the meanwhile she gave her twelve postage cards and three pounds, in case she should not be able to come, charged her not to return without further orders, and took leave of her baby, with floods of passionate tears.

In the comfortable closed carriage the nurse was driven through the streets in a state of exultation scarcely to be described; here at least was absolute freedom for twenty-four hours, and if it proved that there really was any danger of infection, she might be left there some days, and manage to send her mother money to Dartford to buy a third-class ticket with, so that she might be willing to bring over the baby.

This would be a costly pleasure certainly, but her circumstances as she understood them were so comfortable that she could afford it well.

That very afternoon, having taken a friendly leave of the coachman and footman, and established herself in all state in the

clean tidy lodgings which were everything she had described, Mrs. Aird wrote to her mother to relate these circumstances, dwelt on her longing to see her child, and expressed a *naïve*, and perhaps not unnatural, hope that the *rash* might turn out to be scarlatina, in which case she was likely, as she thought, to have her time to herself for at least a week, and she should take it hard if her mother did not spare a day to bring the baby.

The next day passed and no notice was taken of Mrs. Aird; Mrs. Johnstone did not appear, and a card was posted to her according to her directions.

The following day Mrs. Aird's spirits were put into a flutter by the arrival of a telegram, in which she was informed that the little Miss Johnstone really had got scarlatina, that Mrs. Johnstone's doctor would pay her a visit that day at four o'clock, and that he would give her any directions which she might need.

Mrs. Aird was ready to receive the doctor, she was so fresh, clean, cosy, and cheerful, that she looked a very ideal nurse, and the baby only six weeks old (her own being one fortnight older), looked already the better for her ministrations.

The little lodgings were so neat, the house so detached in its pretty little garden, the air so pleasant, that altogether the doctor was very well satisfied. "You may be here a week yet," he observed, knowing that if she was found to be doing her duty she would be there much longer. "Of course it is perfectly understood that you are never to go into London."

"Oh, yes, sir, and I have no such wish, I am sure. I have not a single friend there."

"Nor are you to go into any houses here."

"Sir, I have not a single acquaintance anywhere near."

"Of course you are to have no communi-

cation with Mr. Johnstone's servants, not even by letter."

"You have not been there, then, sir?"

It was taking a great liberty in the nurse to say that.

"Certainly I have," he answered a little sternly; "that is another thing, doctors understand these matters, doctors never convey infection."

"No, sir," answered Mrs. Aird, as an echo of his words, but not as conveying any opinion of her own; "I hope the little girl is not very ill?" she continued.

"Oh, no, quite an ordinary case."

The doctor then stepped out into the road.

"You are in a position of great trust, Mrs. Aird. Prove yourself worthy of it for your own sake. Mr. and Mrs. Johnstone are both rich and kind. By-the-bye, I may be expected to drop in any day."

"Yes, sir, at what time?"

"At any time."

“Then I had better never take the baby out of sight of the house.”

“I don’t say that, I will always send a telegram an hour or so before I come, and if you take care never to be away more than an hour I shall be sure to find you.”

He thus effectually prevented her from doing more than take the baby for a walk, but she by her absolutely contented face when he spoke, prevented his thinking it needful to come! She evidently did not mind the restraint at all, and he left her without having the remotest intention of going near her any more. The baby was thriving, the nurse was well, the lodgings were all that he could wish, the young woman had no friend, and believed herself liable to frequent supervision.

But why was the nurse so well contented to stay at home? Because she had got an answer to her letter from her mother, and it set forth, to her great joy and surprise, that this frugal and respectable woman, having

made up her mind to leave her lodgings at Dartford, where she got as "Maria well knew such a poor living out of the washing," was coming up with the baby to her old quarters at the back of Kensington Square, and to-morrow might be expected to drop in to an early dinner, and, if it was not an ill conveniency, could enjoy a pork chop or two and a green gooseberry pudding.

Mrs. Aird could hardly believe her good fortune. She saw at once a reason, though not the reason, for this sudden resolution. She was herself to have every comfort; if more pork chops were eaten than could have been expected, no questions would be asked provided the baby was well and flourishing. Her mother intended, of course, to come and share in some of the good things. The friend in the lodgings would never tell that she might now and then have cooked for two instead of for one. Moreover the mother had hinted already that she might as well constitute herself the baby's washerwoman

as allow any other woman to have that post. Mrs. Aird was rather late the next morning, and was about to dress the baby, who, having only just been washed, was sprawling on her knee, a little red, limp, crying creature, when, to her delight, her mother with her own baby came in.

“Oh, mother, mother, take this one,” she cried, “and give me mine!”

The exchange was instantly effected, and Mrs Aird began to devour her own baby with kisses. Her mother laid the little Johnstone down on the bed, and let him comfort himself as well as he could with his own tiny fist, while she carefully took off and folded her own best shawl, and put on an apron.

“A nice little fellow,” she then said, looking at him critically. “A fine boy I call him, for he’s as big as yours already, and a fortnight younger. A nice fresh skin,” she continued, taking him up and turning him over on her competent motherly arm,

“not a spot nor—nor—nor, a mark about him. Yes, he’s as near as may be the same weight as yours.”

The young mother, absorbed in her child, took no notice of these remarks, but tenderly cuddling her own baby against her neck, said sighing,—

“And to think he’s weaned ! Oh, how much more interesting he does look than that other woman’s child.”

“La !” cried her mother, “how can you say so, Maria ! I call that real, real foolish. Interesting indeed, one’s just as interesting as—as the other, same size, same blue eyes, and what little down there is on their heads, just the same colour.”

“Well, mother, you were all for my having a nurse-child, so you’re bound to make out it’s for the best.”

“And I hope it’ll prove for the best, my—my girl,” said the mother, with a slow, quiet impressiveness. “Well, if this child ain’t gone off to sleep ! I’ll just wrap him

in—in the nursing apron and put him in his cot. I've brought you a bundle, Maria," she continued, cautiously lifting the child. "A bundle with your two old print gowns in it, no need for you to go tramping up and—and down these dull roads in your good new clothes. Did you manage to—to get those library books returned? I should be loath for you to get into trouble, through their being sent for to the house, such a lot as you had too by what you wrote."

"Yes, mother, I got them back; I had to send them from here by the carrier, and send the ninepence too in stamps for the reading of them."

"See how you waste your money," answered her mother, cautiously laying the baby in his cot, "read, read, for ever read; that's what came of—of my settling at Kensington, and your going to S'Mary Abbots' schools. What a man the old vicar is, to be sure! If all the S'Mary Abbots' scholars can't read the—the smallest print and—and write the

longest words as soon as look at them, it's not for want of his worritting after them. Little he cares, I'll be bound, what your mother had to pay in that very High Street for novels for you to read by candle-light in bed (all along of his being so keen after the learning). It's a wonder you did not burn the house down ! ”

“ Mother,” said Mrs. Aird, “ I don't want Mrs. Johnstone to know I was brought up at Kensington ; she's not aware but what we've lived at Dartford all our lives, instead of only while poor Lancey was with us.”

“ Of course not,” answered her mother, with gentle deliberation, which derived emphasis from a very slight impediment in her speech. “ And she never need, Ma—Maria.”

She showed this imperfection of speech very little unless she was excited or agitated, and this is the exact contrary of what happens in most cases.

“ She hates the notion of my so much as

looking at poor people, as if the very air of them could foul her child," said the daughter.

"Most of 'em do."

"And as to your coming all the way from Dartford through me wanting to set my eyes on my own just for an hour, she'd never believe it."

"Just like 'em again, *but most of us is even with 'em, Ma—Maria*. And it does see—seem a good deal to act out for—for an hour or two, it does in—deed, Maria."

"Well, mother, it does; but you see I sent the money."

"Ay," continued the mother, Mrs. Pearson by name, with her gentle, slow hesitation, "and don't you go hiring your rubbishing no—novels here. It might be found out. And—and—and I've—I've lit on two or three first—first-rate ones, that I brought with me, shilling ones, I got half—half price—Ma—Maria."

"Why should mother be so put out about the novels?" thought Mrs. Aird; "I've

not heard her talk so badly I don't know when."

"What are you doing, mother?"

"Well, I'm not fond of washing frocks constant! you're crumpling the child's robe, and he—he—poor little fellow! has—has but one. I'll lay it by till we—we—go home. And how's Mrs. Leach, Ma—Maria?" (Mrs. Leach was the landlady.)

"She's well, and full of joy; got work for nine days to come, morning till night, charing. I'm to have my dinner cooked at the bake-house, and I shall oblige her by making my bed, and that."

Master Lancelot Aird, having been divested of his best frock, was now laid in his mother's bed, with his bottle, over which he also fell asleep. Mrs. Aird let her mother know that now she could do as she liked, she dined at twelve, and then she could enjoy her tea at four o'clock, and eat a good supper by half-past eight.

"I wonder how you'll do when you've

weaned this child ? ” observed the mother, her capricious impediment quite gone ; “ you ’ ll find a difference then, my girl. ”

“ Don ’ t talk of that, mother ; I hope that won ’ t be for six months at least. ”

“ It ’ ll be no trouble, ” replied the mother, “ be it sooner or later—sooner or later, Ma—Maria. For by what you told me, he has been used to have the bottle once a day from his birth. I had no trouble with—with yours my—my—my girl. And—and if their being as like as—as two peas is any—any rule, you ’ ll have none with—with him. ”

“ There she goes again, ” thought Mrs. Aird, quite impressed by the uncommon degree of discomfort that her mother was suffering.

Then it all went off again, the dinner was carried into the tiny parlour, the two babes slept in peace, and the two women, leaving the door open, sat down to enjoy themselves, a pot of porter, and some new bread, and other luxuries being set on the table.

“ Mrs. Leach doesn ’ t so much as know I

brought your child," said Mrs. Pearson, the young widow's mother.

"Why should she, mother?" answered Mrs. Aird sharply, "she might take it into her head to tell Mrs. Johnstone."

The mother nodded with an air of wisdom and triumph. "The children have all got the scarlatina now, my girl, and one of them is very ill."

"How do you know, mother?"

"I went and inquired. Said I to the cook, she was cleaning the steps, 'Mrs. Thompson's love, and has heard the little Johnstones are ill, and I was to inquire. She told me all I wanted to know. Mrs. Johnstone's very unwell herself, and the servants say she'll certainly fret herself sick, so ill as she has just been, and she won't leave the children a minute. 'Well,' said I, 'you won't forget to give Mrs. Thompson's love to your lady;' and I left. You've some days to yourself, my girl, yet."

"So I think, mother."

"Then—then—then do—your best."

“Yes, mother, why not?” answered Mrs. Aird carelessly, when at last her mother had managed to utter these words. Mrs. Aird now went into the little kitchen and fetched in the pudding, she was by no means too proud to wait on herself when her friend and landlady was busy.

And now that this comfortable meal was over, Mrs. Pearson, to her daughter’s great surprise, expressed a strong wish to see Kew Gardens. “But as you’ve never dressed the baby, Maria,” she continued, “along of his being asleep, you have no call to come too, you can see them any day. There he is awake, I hear him stirring, and yours’ll wake too directly.” She stepped out into the road, and before her daughter had recovered from the surprise of feeling that there was something unusual about her mother, she was gone. “I’ll—I’ll—I’ll be in by tea-time, my—my girl,” she said; “undo the bundle and put in any—anything you have for the wash, and I’ll take it with me.”

CHAPTER II.

MRS. PEARSON had no sooner departed than the Johnstone baby began to cry lustily. His nurse took him up, and while she sat on the side of the bed, satisfying his little wants, she gazed at her own child with tender love.

Two or three tears rolled down her comely cheeks, while the alien baby made himself at home at her breast, and half choked his greedy little self, over the nourishment she had sold away from her own.

As she held her nurseling with one hand, she drew towards her the bundle her mother had brought, with the other, untied the knots, shook out her two gowns, and three shabby little volumes fell away from them on to the bed. She lifted one, and a sudden touch of self-consciousness made her feel how odd it

was that her mother should have accidentally lighted on such a story ; but she put it aside without another thought, for she had read it before, and it was not interesting. Then she took up the next, and when she saw that it was on the same subject—a very common and favourite subject with writers of fiction—she no longer thought there was any accident in the matter. Her mother, she perceived, had brought these books to her on purpose to suggest what she did not dare to say. She took up the third book—one very dirty volume from an old-fashioned story called “The Changeling.”

She turned very pale; her first thought was one of almost unreasonable anger against her mother. If she had been minded to do this thing, as she now perceived, she could not have done it without an accomplice, without doubling therefore the slender chance of escape from detection. She felt that a longing that such a thing could have been done had already existed deep down in her

heart. She accused her mother as alone having given it form and possibility. The little nurseling, now fed to the full, was awake and quiet in her arms; but temptation was too new to be acted on. She put on his fine and ample clothes all but his robe, and laying him down beside the other babe, began to recall the things her mother had said. They had the same coloured eyes, the same coloured down on their heads, they were about the same size; but as to bringing the remote romances of a by-gone age into families that lived in Harley Street and sent a baby with his nurse to Kew—now, at this very present time—it was a thing too arduous for thought, too wicked for every-day life. An Irish castle—tumble-down, haunted by ghosts, and full of retainers—had been the scene of one of these stories. A fugitive family hundreds of years ago had stolen away the heir of the house, in another; and had left their child in its stead.

In the third, children were also changed at nurse—but there was a gipsy in the case, and there were awful midnight incantations, and the nurse was conjured into the crypt of a ruined chapel, far among the Scotch mountains ; and there the baby was charmed away from her, and an elf-child left in her arms.

She mocked at her mother, and was sore against her in her heart. She was holding up the brodered robe of her nurseling ; did it look like anything that her child could wear upon his pretty low-born limbs without detection ? Yes ! There was nothing to choose. He was the finer child of the two ; at least, if there was anything to choose between them.

It was time he had his bottle. She would warm its contents for him. She did so, and her tears fell fast, as she leaned over the little kitchen fire.

When he had finished this meal—each child being full dressed, excepting that it had its frock off—she thought she should

like to see how her child would look in the beautiful robe. She put it on; and to her fond eyes he seemed to become it far better than the other did. To change them! Oh, that such a thing could be! But she was not unreasonable; she knew as well as possible that it could not; but, for the moment—only for the moment—her child should look like the gentleman's son. Nature was not unfair at the first; the carpenter's baby as he had come from her hand was as fair, as refined, as innocent in aspect as he could be. It would only be when art stepped in and educated him, that he would be, however he might dress, all the cockney and all the carpenter.

His mother (over the Johnstone baby's robe) put on the delicate blue cashmere cloak, enriched with swan's-down, and the pretty satin hood, with its lace cockade. And sat hanging over him with a yearning sense of envy against the other baby and a rapture of pride in him.

She did not care whether her mother came in or not. She would by no means do this thing. In fact, it could not be done with the least chance of success—but not the less, her mother should know she perceived she had been tempted—not the less—A sudden qualm at the nurse's heart. A noise of wheels! A dust rising up! A carriage!—oh misfortune, a carriage,—and both the children in the house; she herself, sitting in the little bedroom, which was on the ground floor and led out of the sitting-room, must have been plainly seen by its one occupant—a lady; and this lady was now descending. It was Mr. Johnstone's mother. Something must be done, and done instantly. But nothing could ever make things come right if it were discovered that two babies were in the house and one of them her own. She had but one instant to decide! the lady was coming up the tiny garden. The little Johnstone was lying contentedly on the bed—no time to dress him, no time to un-

dress the other. She kept her own baby on her arm, and in sheer desperation opened the bedroom door, and shutting it behind her, came to meet her guest with a curtsey and a welcome. Something sadly like a prayer was on her trembling lips—her situation was terrible—and for the first few moments while the supposed grandmother—a fine capable woman little more than fifty, who had just come up from Scotland—lifted the baby's lace veil, kissed him, chirped to him, and asked how he was, she trembled so as to attract attention—he was lying flat on his mother's arms staring at the nodding feathers in the visitor's bonnet.

“You look very pale, nurse!” exclaimed the grandmother.

“Oh, ma'am,” answered Mrs. Aird, the ready lie rising to her lips. “I was afraid you might be come to say the children were worse.”

“The children are worse, I am sorry to say,” was the answer. “I have not seen

them, of course, that would not be prudent—but Mr. Johnstone writes me word that Miss Irene causes them a good deal of anxiety.

“You may put your bonnet on, nurse. The darling is dressed—you shall take him out with me for a little airing in the carriage.”

What! and leave the other baby all alone on the bed? Mrs. Aird felt as if her heart stood still.

“Oh, ma’am,” she exclaimed, lying again, “I am so sorry, but the person of the house is gone out for an hour or so, just to do a little shopping, and I promised to see to the house while she was away—and she has locked the back-door and given me the key.”

“Oh, well, another time, then,” said the lady slowly, and as if Mrs. Aird’s manner surprised her.

“You are quite well?” she inquired.

“Oh, yes, as well as can be, ma’am,” and

all her soul was in her ears. What if the Johnstone baby should cry !

“Pretty little man,” said the grandmother, again caressing the baby, but not taking him from the nurse ; “I hope he is thriving.” She had not seen her grandson before.

“Oh, ma’am, he is as good-tempered and as contented as he can be.” The nurse had now recovered her colour, every moment that the other baby remained quiet was a great gain, she was beginning to pluck up courage, and was trying to look cheerful.

“Well, well,” said the lady, smiling kindly, “I confess I do not see much virtue in a baby’s contentment, when he has as good cause for it as I hear you give this one.”

“Thank you, ma’am, I am sure I try to give satisfaction.”

“I am very well satisfied,” answered the grandmother graciously, “I shall write to my daughter that I am.”

A few more commonplaces, a few more

adverse chances to be overlived, a few more flutterings of the heart on the part of the nurse, and then her visitor got up and took her leave and went back to the carriage, followed by the nurse with her own child in her arms. It seemed to her that she had never listened and never looked before.

That baby on the bed, how her ears were open to him ! That velvet mantle she was following, how she noted every fold and every "frog" upon it !

But now her curtsey was made and the carriage was gone.

She ran back into the house, laid her child on the bed, and burst into tears ; for the first time in her life she knew what bitterness there is in the fear of detection. "The wages of sin are hard." Her ruin as regarded this situation and the character she hoped to have from it would have been irretrievable if anything had been found out.

Even if she had meant really to do the thing, and keep to it, such an inter-

view would have been more than she could have borne. What if Mrs. Leach had walked in and it had come out that she had not left the house at all! What if the other baby had begun to cry! And yet how sweet that one of her own had looked when the strange visitor had nodded and chirped to him, and he had twisted his tiny mouth into the promise of a smile!

It was not worth while to go through so much.

No, that was not exactly it. She loved herself as well as her baby. She had not expected to be so frightened. The least questioning would have betrayed all. She never could so much as *act* such a thing again, and she pulled down the broidered robe, even tearing it in her hurry, and threw it aside from her own child. Then she took up her nurseling, dressed him in all his bravery, and waited her mother's arrival with an easier heart. She had not known herself before. She was aware now what shame

and dread had come of the mere prophecy of a crime in her heart.

What, then, would experience be ! Well, it might be a pity, perhaps it was ; but she was not one of those who could stand such a thing. It was not her conscience that was awake, but her reason ; even if she could do such a thing successfully, she should suffer constant fear of detection ; she would not do it.

Master Johnstone had enjoyed his supper, and was in his cot, and Master Aird had enjoyed his bottle before Mrs. Pearson came in.

She entered slowly, and as if she would not startle her daughter. Mrs. Aird had one of the babies on her knee. Mrs. Pearson never cast her eyes on him.

“La, Maria, my girl,” were her first words ; “such queer things as I have seen !”

“No, have you, mother ?” answered Mrs. Aird, with a keen consciousness that her mother cared about the said things nothing in the world.

“If some of those cactus things wasn’t

just like an—an old man's head all over white hairs, my name's not Fanny Pearson," said the mother, without any signs of hesitation. "There was a—a glass-house full of such. The last time I saw them was the first bank holiday Parliament made. The shops all shut up, and yet the Punches going, and barrows of fruit *cried* all about the streets, it was just like—like a wicked Sunday, that had got sorted wrong and come in the middle of the—the week."

Her daughter, with a baby on her knee, remained silent.

"And so tea's ready, Maria, my girl, and very acceptable, I say." She glanced at her daughter, and noticed the signs of tears upon her face. "I'm always glad of—of my tea," she continued; "how quiet the dear children are!" she added, as she drew her chair to the table.

"One of them has been crying pretty hard," replied the daughter, without specifying which.

She had a little white pinafore in her hand, and seemed to be giving her attention to the sleeve which she was folding back with a button.

Her mother glanced keenly at her, but did not dare to look at the face of the child she had on her knee.

Tea was now poured out. Mrs. Pearson had begun to feel the silence rather awkward, when at last her daughter said, "Those three novels you brought me, mother, I wonder you should have thought I hadn't read them, they're old things every one of them."

"Well," answered the mother, with obliging suavity, "if you don't mean to read them again, I'll take them back, Ma—Maria."

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Aird. She knew she was making her mother uncomfortable, but a certain slight perversity of temper afflicted her just then. "I saw you'd looked them over before you chose them," she continued.

Her mother reddened, she was not at all sure that the thing suggested had not been done. "Maria's so deep," she reflected, "that she's quite capable of playing at innocence with me. Still 'Least said is soonest mended,' and I wish she would hold her tongue."

"I'll take them back," she managed to say, with many breaks and repetitions through the return of her impediment, and she rose and tied them up in a blue handkerchief, and returned almost meekly to the tea-table, she was quite at her daughter's mercy now; she could not articulate tolerably. The least little smile hovered about Mrs. Aird's lips, such a subtle small smile as justified at once her mother's assertion that she was "deep."

"I should burn them, mother, if I was you," she observed calmly, "not that they signify."

Her mother answered nothing.

"I've read dozens such—dozens," con-

tinued the daughter. "I've not forgot one of them. They're enough to dishearten the willingest sinner that ever breathed."

"I don't know what you mean, Maria," the mother burst out, anger overcoming her hesitation. She hardly knew whether she was most angry with her daughter for "giving words" to the matter at all when perfect silence would have been most prudent, or for thus leaving her in some doubt what she had done or meant to do, or for (as it really seemed) not being perfectly certain whether she dared trust her own mother.

"Don't know what I mean, mother?" rejoined the daughter, that small smile hovering over her upper lip; "well, I call them disheartening because after *they've* (whoever they may be), after they've done it so beautiful, you know, they're always found out." The mother looked very red and irate. "No," she continued, appearing to cogitate, "I don't remember one but what's found out, nor one but what's brought to shame for it."

And what was the effect of this speech on the mother? She caught the subtle smile as it went and came, it never rose higher than the lip or warmed the eye, and she was in doubt. Something had put Maria out she thought; perhaps though she meant to do the thing that had been hinted at, the peril of it mixed as worm-wood with the sweetness of her hope.

“They’re always found out,” repeated the daughter.

The mother recovered speech. “No, *they’re not*,” she replied angrily, “*I know better than that.*”

The significance of her manner was inexpressible. Mrs. Aird gave a great start, and with frightened eyes gazed at the woman who had claimed for herself such awful experience. But having said so much, the mother either could not or would not say more. She poured out some tea, cut her daughter more bread and butter, and still not looking at the baby, scarcely looking in

his direction, left her words to work their due effect.

What she had to do was finished. She had made a certain suggestion, and her daughter surely was aware that she might count on her help to carry it out.

There was silence ; then Mrs. Leach, the landlady, came in. She had a promise of several days' charring, wanted for many days to be away till eight o'clock at night, was very anxious to propitiate. Did Mrs. Aird think she should mind answering the door herself if anybody came to see the baby ? Mrs. Aird was sure she should not, and also was quite willing to have a baked dinner for the next few days.

Mrs. Leach had not seen the second baby who had made his appearance on the scene, neither the mother nor the daughter cared to mention him. He was lying on his mother's bed with his bottle. The little Johnstone, taking it into his head to be very fractious, Mrs. Aird carried him into the bedroom,

and there, shutting herself in, comforted him and contemplated her heir. The mother and Mrs. Leach meanwhile (tea being over) proceeded into the back of the house together, to inspect a new copper, and were a long while away, so that Mrs. Aird had plenty of time for thought.

It was nearly three quarters of an hour before Mrs. Pearson returned and saw her daughter sitting by the window with a baby on her lap. He was dressed in the robe that had been folded up so carefully in the morning, had on the neat little grey cloak and hood familiar to Mrs. Pearson's eyes, he had also a fine handkerchief trimmed with imitation lace lightly laid over his face. A bundle of clothes to be washed was lying beside her. The nurse explained that the omnibus her mother had wished to go back by was very nearly due, and that she had dressed the baby ready. The grandmother did not look either at her or at the child with anything but a hasty glance.

She took the child upon her arm and advanced to the open door, but the omnibus was not yet visible. She could not stand waiting, she felt too much excited, and she proposed, as well as her impediment permitted, to go on and let it overtake her. She was just stepping out when, as if by an irresistible impulse, the daughter exclaimed, "Oh, I must have another kiss of him." She flung back the handkerchief, and, behold, it was the same baby that had been brought, it was the carpenter's child! the grandmother could not doubt it, and anger reddened her face and filled her soul.

Then Maria had not done it after all—after the trouble she had taken to come and live at Kensington—after the day's work she had given up in order to bring the child to Kew. She was so wrath that she would have liked to box Maria's ears. So irate in fact when Maria burst into a little chuckling laugh that she trembled all over till she was fain to step inside again and sit down, setting

her bundle beside her on the floor. Mrs. Aird, after that small laugh, darted into the bedroom and appeared with the other baby in her arms and an air of simple innocence. The omnibus went by and neither of them noticed it till too late. The mother was trying hard to calm herself, and the irate hue of her face was fading; the daughter had the subtle smile about her lips when their eyes met, but it gave way to a gleam of surprise when her mother spoke as pleasantly as if nothing had happened.

“I wish you could have managed to take him off my hands for two days while I look about me, Ma—Maria, he is a great handful.”

“Why, mother, it would be found out, you know it would.”

“Mrs. Leach don’t know he’s here; you couldn’t help your own crying now and then in the night, but there’s no ne—eed they should ever bo—oth cry together, for the other you can always stop. They’d only—only seem to be one.”

“ So I could, mother ; how I should love to have him till you bring the clothes back ! ”

“ The doctor is to send a telegram if ever he comes. There’s a girl in the cottage round by the green that would take him out at what’s calling time for ladies, Ma—Ma—ria.”

“ To be sure,” answered the daughter ; “ they never lunch till nearly two, they cannot possibly get here till three at earliest ; I might send the blessed babe out at that time of day. The girl need never see my nurse-child. Well, mother—”

“ Well, you’ll take him off—off—my hands then, till the clothes are—are—are ready.”

Mrs. Aird took him, that is, she got her mother to lay him in the cot, for her own arms were full, and she agreed with her mother to send on the girl who had been mentioned to speak to her. The temptation, as she herself looked upon it, was over, she had not yielded. She now thought she could enjoy the sweet for that little time without

the bitter. She could have her own baby to sleep in her arms for those two nights, and send him away during the afternoon, so that she could no more suffer as she had done during the grandmother's visit. She was glad at heart. It was only safety she wanted. Not to do the right, but to be safe in doing wrong. So the baby was left, and Mrs. Pearson departed with a light step and considerable confidence in her mind as to what would be the end of it. There never was such a chance, as she told herself as she went home—babies altered from week to week, who could challenge them? The mother who could at this moment tell her child out of a hundred was sure not to come near him for fear of infection; and though she might in her jealous love and care send a friend almost every day to look that he was happy, clean, and cared for, the visit would be of no use as regarded the child's real danger, the only danger that threatened him.

Mrs. Johnstone did indeed send almost

every day, and was consoled by letters from various friends who came at her desire. They always found a charming, fresh, healthy young nurse, a clean room and a fat baby. They never found any one with the nurse. She seemed glad to see them, and always expressed much sympathy with Mrs. Johnstone.

CHAPTER III.

AT about ten o'clock on the morning of the appointed day, Mrs. Pearson entered the cottage at Kew with the baby Johnstone's clean clothes.

Mrs. Aird looked tired and flushed. "Such a night as I have had, mother, you wouldn't believe!" she exclaimed; "as fast as one was quiet the other set off crying, and it's been nothing but cry, cry, one or the other, all the time I've been washing and dressing them. They're both just fed, and I hope they'll take a spell of sleep now, for I'm about tired out."

The clothes from the wash were then spread on the table, and Maria proceeded to pay her mother for doing them.

"And now, mother, sit down," she pro-

ceeded. "You are the washerwoman, you see, sit down, but in case anybody should come in, leave the money and the clothes on the table to look natural."

"Nobody will come to-day," answered the mother, rather seriously.

"Why not?"

"That—that little girl that was first taken ill—she's dead, Maria."

"Mother!"

"Yes, I inquired, and—and the cook told me;" she gave a little gasp here, as if making a supreme effort to overtake and run down her words, then went on quite easily. She said, "They've just sent the death to the *Times*, and—and you'll see it to-morrow, 'Irene, beloved child of Donald Johnstone, aged three years and three months.'"

"Yes, she was their eldest child. Poor Mrs. Johnstone! I wonder how the others are, mother?"

"Very ill by what I hear; the cook said

Mrs. Johnstone was very ill too, and the master was so knocked down by that, and his trouble at the child's death, that it was a pity to see him."

"He is very fond of her; I wonder whether she is going to have the fever."

"Nobody will know that yet, with grown-up people it seldom shows before the fourteenth day. But—but—but, dear me, my girl, you do look tired out."

"I am tired. I'm sorry at my heart for the Johnstones. Mother, I've done a deal of thinking since we parted."

"Thinking about what, Ma—Maria?"

"Well, partly about you, mother, and what you let out the other day."

"I suppose, whatever you may have thought all your—all your life, you—you—you never thought your mother was a fool?"

"No, I never did; but I have thought there might be things—"

"Things as you'd have a right to hear when you was older. Well, there might be,

or again there might—might—might not be, Ma-Maria.”

“But if you go on like this, mother, I shall know as clear as can be that you’re not easy in your mind about trusting me, and don’t seem to like it; if so, I’d as lief not hear anything.”

“I’ve no call to be uneasy, Ma—Maria, what I had a hand in is done constant—constant, Maria.”

“Mother!”

“And if I tell it you now, it’s—it’s for your good.”

“Yes, mother, what else should it be for?” but the daughter blushed, and the mother looked anywhere rather than at her face.

“Before I married your father, when I was in service—nursemaid to Mrs. Plumstead—we were in Italy, and the baby died.”

“Yes, I’ve heard you say so.”

“But she kept me, Ma—Maria, for there was another expected very soon, and the

master was going so fast in con—consumption, that she was glad enough of me to help to nurse him.”

She lifted the edge of a Paisley shawl she had on. “She was very free-spoken. This very shawl, such a good one it was, she gave it me the first par—particular talk we had. She said she knew *he* (she—she always called him *he*, and whispered as if she was cautious about being overheard)—she knew *he* couldn’t live long, and she did so wish for a boy. Once when—when we talked she said, ‘If—if I have a girl, I shall be a nobody; but if it’s a boy, he will inherit the estate, and I shall have a handsome allowance for—for bringing of him up.’ She said, ‘Fanny Slade, my husband is very dark, as—as dark as most Italians. It’s likely his son should be dark. Don’t you think,’ she said, very soft and gentle, ‘Don’t you think I can manage to have a boy?’ I knew a—a good many of her thoughts by that time, I said, ‘You wouldn’t be so cruel, ma’am. What!

and—and leave your own child, if it's a girl, with these nuns and people.'

"She laughed me to scorn at that. 'Leave my own, if it's a girl,' she said; 'for shame of you, to think of such a thing, but why—why—why shouldn't I have twins, Fanny Slade?'

"She had a curious smile, Ma—Maria. Many an hour I sat and thought on it after I left her. A little smile like—like yours. She was so deep that I could never make out more of her than—than she liked to explain. Yet she seemed so free-spoken. I often wondered over her. She would sit and look up in the bare sky, not a bit afraid of it."

"Why should she have been afraid of it?"

"Why—why, wait till—till you see it, everything wiped clean away betwixt you and heaven; seems as—as if *they* must see down so awful clear—everything you're doing, and that for—for weeks and weeks together. When—when I came to have things on my

mind I hated that sky, and there seemed to be nothing worth breathing, it was so clear. All the time before you were born, I—I often sat and thought how she would paint her flowers, and smile when he wasn't looking at her. He—he was very fond of her. She had a dove-coloured quilted satin gown, and she would be dressed in it for him to admire her, and then when he fell asleep she would smile.

“ She said, ‘ Why shouldn't I have twins, Fanny Slade ? ’ and she looked at—at—at me so quiet. She would be often painting, and—and she would send me out under the olive-trees to—to gather flowers for her. I didn't like it. You—you may think your mother soft, Ma—Maria, but I often cried over that work, I—I assure you.”

“ Why, mother ? ”

“ They were so mortal beautiful ; they stood so thick together, white, and crimson, and blue, in the shadow among the green wheat, all scent and glory. I was afraid of

them, for—for—for I knew the Lord would never have made them like that, and not often be coming down to look at them.”

All this time the daughter listened wide-eyed, and the mother whispered, “We had been all the winter in that little island I told you of, they call it Capri; and now we was journeying—we—we was journeying slowly home, Ma—Maria. The orange-trees were full of blossom, and what with their scent and the sun I—I—I used to feel quite giddy.

“We stopped once at a little—little village inn, for the master was very faint; he went indoors, and he laid himself down on the bed to rest a couple of hours. We sat down on a bench under a vine. As we sat we saw a young girl with a very young baby on—on her arm. Down there they fix them out straight. Mrs. Plumstead called her, and began to whisper to her, and she sat—sat down almost at her feet. She could speak Italian quite well, but the master could not, at—at all, no, nor understand it.

“ Such a pretty young girl she was, and by—by what Mrs. Plumstead told me, she had no father for her babe.

“ Well, I went in to see how the master was, and—and we dined there; after that they sent for me, and when I came she said, ‘ Fanny Slade, Mr. Plumstead has—has just noticed that my diamond ring is not on my finger, and he is sure I had it this—this morning.’ ‘ Sure,’ said he. She looked at me so—so calm and gentle. Said he, ‘ I seem to recall the sound of some small thing that I heard roll on the floor before dinner,’ and he thought it had rolled under the skirt—ing. Well, I searched, and when it was not found, if he didn’t have all the flooring up! she encouraging him. But my thought was that she had given it to the girl. Well, we—we slept there, and—and—and the next day he was better. We went on and then stopped (because she said she was tired), in the market-place of a little small town, and there to—to—to my wonder, I saw that same

girl forty miles from her home, looking out for us. I—I looked at missis. She said, so gentle and sweet, ‘Love, I wish you were not so short-sighted,’ she said, ‘there is such a pretty cos—costume down there,’ that was said to him, but it was meant for me, he—he could not see the girl. We had a vast deal of talk that afternoon, she and I. Then we went on and—and again, in a little village by an inn door was the girl, she had gone on before us, Mrs.—Mrs. Plumstead saying what—what inn she should drive to. We did not move any more. That—that night Mrs. Plumstead was taken ill, and about dawn her baby was born, and—and, Ma—ria, it was a girl.

“As soon as the doctor was gone I knocked at—at Mr. Plumstead’s door. Well, it—it was shocking to hear him thank God for my lie. I told him he had twin children born, a son and a daughter.”

She gave a little gasp here in this the crisis of her story, and as if her words could

not be commanded, went back to an easier part of it.

“ Mrs. Plumstead had said to me, ‘ I mean to have that girl for a wet nurse, and I have told her also to—to wash her baby and bring him to me to—to look at.’ I could see in the dawn light how—how wan Mr. Plumstead looked ; but he gave thanks as—as well as he could like a Christian ; and—and said he, ‘ It’s a sin—singular thing, Fanny Slade, that Mrs. Plumstead has more than once expressed to me a sort of pre—sentiment, that she should have twins.’

“ I was obliged to leave him, ill as—as he seemed. When I went to him again he seemed to rally a bit, but little as I knew then about sickness and death, I knew that death was nigh.

“ And—and he would send me out for flowers. There never were such people for flowers. They were easy enough to get, the olive-yards were choked up with them, spread-out anemones, and tulips, and Jacob’s ladder.

I pulled an armful, but I was frightened, for—for there was a sign in the sky.”

“Mother! what sign?”

“I had—had seen too many pictures of angels not to know what sign. It was a vast way off. It was an angel, you could not make out the form of its—its body, but his two long pointed wings just like a gauze cloud were tilted towards the world as—as if he was flying down. I saw the—the faint shadow of them, it fell just where I stood.”

“You saw only the white wings?”

“Yes, I tell you only the wings. The sky being so clear there, you can see things, Maria, that—that here are invisible. It was the Angel of Death passing—passing down and going to stop.

“I ran in. He was propped up with pillows, writing to his father, to express the birth of the twins. He—he directed the letter and sent me to his wife with his dear love, and how did she feel herself? When I got back, dying he was with the letter in his hand. I

could see his face change as I gave him the—the message. He expressed he was pleased, but he soon began to ramble in his talk, and just at noon that day he died in my arms, as softly as could be.

“We kept the—the girl about us, and when Mrs. Plumstead was able to travel, we took her and the—the boy-baby too, for it was made out that the poor lady was—was too delicate by half to nurse her child.

“When we got well away, Mrs. Plumstead had to give the—the girl a very heavy bribe, to leave her child. She was a thief and a good-for-nothing little—little hussy; but she loved her baby, and at last Mrs. Plumstead got out her jewel-case and sat smiling at her, and showed her—her two diamond earrings; and she sat staring as—as if she would eat them. Then Mrs. Plumstead put them in her ears, and gave her a little hand-glass to look at herself; but she kept sulking and pouting. Then Mrs. Plumstead gave her a pink coral brooch, and she

began to talk and smile and show her pretty white teeth; and—and at last Mrs. Plumstead shook out a long gold chain, and looked at her and smiled, and put it round her neck, and—and the girl started up and gave a great cry, and ran out of the room, never looking back, and took herself off, and—and we saw her no more.

“That’s all about it, Maria, it was very easy done. We soon hired a wet nurse for the boy, and came out of Italy to a place they—they call Mentone.

“But nothing seemed to go right, for here the little girl baby died, and Mrs. Plumstead took on most—most fearful, and made out that I’d encouraged her to do the thing, and the death of the baby was sent to punish her. She fretted and used to put herself quite in a rage over the letters she got from her relations. She must be—be thankful, they all said, she’d got her dear boy left.

“She was all brown, her cheeks were soft and brown, and her eyes like—like brown

velvet. The baby was not as brown as she. Well, Maria, in a few months we came to England, and there I did a—a foolish thing—”

The daughter, all eyes, sat listening ; tears were on the mother's cheeks.

“A foolish thing, and lost my hold over her. I married your father. He came to see me, and vowed he would not wait any longer. And I married him.”

“Well, mother, many's the time you said he made you a good husband, and he never drank.”

“No, my girl ; but *she* had promised me two hundred pounds, and she—she said she could not get at it before I married, for—for she must not part with any more of her jewels. Afterwards she was engaged to be married again, and I—I heard it. I was bent on having that money. I thought if she put me off any more, I would threaten her that I would speak ; and as soon as I got well, after you were born, I took you on my arm

and went to her house. Oh, Ma—Maria ! it cuts me to the heart to think on it. I'd done my level best to serve her, and nothing was to come of it.

“ ‘ You cannot speak with Mrs. Plumstead to-day,’ said the butler, ‘ she’s distracted with—with grief ; we’ve lost Master Geoffry.’ I did see her, though ; she was hiding herself in her dressing-room. She did not wish it to be seen that she had no tears to shed. But oh ! she was vexed. He had died of croup. I saw it was a bad chance for me ; she—she put me off with promises and promises.”

“ Then why didn’t you say you would speak of it ? ” asked the daughter eagerly.

“ Where would have been the use, my girl ? And—and she promised me so fair. Who could I tell it to either—nobody cared ? He was out of the way of the next heir, and—and—and the girl could never come and seek her own ; she did not so much as know our names. But, Maria, it—it seemed hard.”

“ Mother, didn’t I say that those stories

never end well? They are alike for that."

"I got but ten pounds of her, Maria, and when I was put out she smiled—yes, she did; she—she looked at me and smiled!"

"It was a shame."

"Ay, and she soon went to Scotland with her new husband, and had five fine boys, one after the other; but—but she never gave me aught but their old clothes for mine, and paid the carriage of the parcels—I will say that: she—she paid the carriage."

"You've no writing for the two hundred?" asked the daughter.

"No—and there's nothing to be done. I—I—I can't punish her without accusing myself."

"If you think so, mother—"

"I know it, my girl, and it seems to hold me back; and me only five and forty and a widow, to think of my missing such a payment after—after, as you may say, it was fairly won!"

“I’m sorry I vexed you the other day, mother,” said the daughter with absurd compunction.

“Ay, Ma—Maria, my girl, it was not dutiful of you.” The daughter kissed her, and the mother wiped away some tears. Then there was a long silence.

“You’ll stop and dine, mother? We could both dine in the kitchen; and, if anybody called, I could leave you and baby there,” said Mrs. Aird at last.

“No, I’d best not; but if you could keep him another day or so—”

“To be sure, mother. Why, I find nobody ever comes except between three and six. As to Mrs. Leach, she’ll not have a day at home for the next fortnight, so she’ll never see him. Leave him, mother, and, when I want you to come for him, I’ll drop you a post-card.”

So Mrs. Pearson departed, not having stayed more than an hour or seen either of the children.

Mr. Johnstone's mother drove over again that afternoon, and wept as she told the story of the little Irene's death, and the father's distress. Her daughter-in-law, she said, was causing great anxiety to them all by the way that she appeared to be sinking under this trial. Maria Aird won golden opinions for herself by the tears she also shed when she heard this.

One baby was gone out for a walk, in charge of the girl; the other was lying on her knee: which was it? If it was not the same that Mrs. Johnstone's mother had seen two or three days before, she certainly did not notice any such fact.

Maria Aird, after that, expected at least one visitor every day, and never failed to have one. The day following the grandmother's visit came a telegram from the doctor. She was in every way ready for him; the house very clean, the baby fast asleep (she said she had just nursed him), the other baby away.

"I shall not be able to come again," he

said as he departed. "Mrs. Johnstone's mother will now see that you have what you want. At the same time, if anything should ail the child, you will of course telegraph to me; for in such a case, you understand, I certainly should come."

So he took his leave, having done mischief which, when it disclosed itself, he was truly sorry for. But what are doctors to do? He had changed his coat after his morning visit to Harley Street, and, as we all know, doctors never convey infection.

Mrs. Pearson had agreed with her daughter that a card should be posted to her when the baby was to be fetched, but she was very much surprised when a fortnight within one day had elapsed, and the expected card had not arrived. "But Maria is very deep," she reflected, "and, *if she is going to do her duty* by her own child, she'll yet be wishful that I should not know it—know it, for certain. Very like I may go on to the end of my days and never hear the real truth from her own

mouth ; but I shall feel sure about what it is for all that ; and she thinks the child may alter a good bit in a fortnight. Besides, she'll have weaned the other."

The same evening a letter arrived :—

" DEAREST MOTHER,

" I feel myself very ill. Come as soon as ever you can to-morrow morning and fetch away Lancey. They are both so very fractious, I don't know where to turn. [*" Both so fractious, are they? I expected it of one of them," mused the grandmother.*] I shall get up as early as I can, and have mine ready. I do so want you to take him ; I cannot do with them both [*" That looks well ! "*], for my head aches so, night and day, and his fretting makes me feel worse. Mother, don't fail to come.

" Your dutiful daughter,

" MARIA JANE AIRD."

At nine o'clock the next morning, Mrs. Pearson walked in. Her daughter Maria, who seemed to be sitting up with difficulty,

was dressing one baby ; the other—presumably her own—was already in cloak and hood.

The mother's keen glance made her at once aware of something more the matter than she had anticipated. The daughter acknowledged no discomforts but headache and sore throat, and was presently so giddy that her mother made her go into the chamber and lie down on her bed.

And now, as is often the case, the daughter found herself more than commonly under the dominion of her natural qualities of mind, just, as it seemed, because it was more than commonly needful to success that she should escape from them.

She preserved an open innocence of manner, and said nothing at all to her mother, who knew, or thought, at once that no confidence would be reposed in her, and that all depended on her own keenness of observation. So she left her on her bed, and, taking her time to examine the children, to cogitate, and to make her arrangements,

sent, in about an hour, by a passing child, to fetch the girl always trusted to carry out one of the children, put him into her arms in the little grey cloak and veil, and, having already despatched a telegram for the doctor, sat nursing the other child till his carriage appeared, and out he bustled. Mrs. Pearson met him.

“ My daughter wrote me word, sir, last night, that she felt herself ill, and I have just come over to see her.”

“ What is the matter ? ”

“ I hope, sir, considering that—that she has done her best,” the mother began, following him into the little chamber.

“ Take the baby out of the room,” were almost his first words.

“ I feel so confused, sir, and my throat so sore,” said the poor young creature.

Mrs. Aird felt more confused as the day wore on, but she knew her mother was sometimes present, and that both the babies were gone.

She was quite able also to take pleasure

in the knowledge that she was to be nursed at the charges of the Johnstones, and she did not forget that, when her mother said to the doctor that she knew very well how her daughter had caught the infection which had deprived her of her situation, he looked concerned, said not a word, but put his hand in his pocket and gave her a sovereign.

She was skilfully and carefully nursed, and was never seriously ill—scarcely in bed more than a fortnight.

Then began her education.

She sat up, thin, white-handed, and with eyes full of brooding thought and doubtful cogitation. She was to remain in the little lodgings at Kew for a full month, and then to have change, that the Johnstones might not have it on their consciences that anything was left undone for her good, or to prevent the further spread of infection.

Mr. Johnstone's mother had fetched away the baby, and happily he did not have the fever. The other child took it, and, of course,

was nursed in the little lodgings at the back of Kensington Square.

Always in doubt, turning things over in her mind, Maria Aird would sit out in Kew Gardens, pondering over what she had done. "Was it worth while to have done this thing? No, but it was now not worth while to go through the far worse misery of undoing it. But was it done, after all? That depended entirely on what had been her mother's opinion of matters when she had been left alone with the children. But, oh, to be well again!" thought the young woman, "and see the baby again. I shall know whether it's my own or not. If it is, after all I've gone through, I think I shall be glad, though it may seem hard, when I'd got it done, to have it undone. Yet if it is not—oh! I do think I must confess it, come what will!"

But all sense of the possibility of such a thing as confession and restitution was soon over, and every day she got more used to the dull brooding pain that had worn itself

a home in her breast. She knew and felt that she had done a criminal action, but she did not, strange to say, by any means think of herself as a criminal.

A criminal seemed to be some one whose crime was a part of himself, some one with whom crime was ingrain, and she felt, in spite of all Bible teaching and school teaching, as if her fault was external to herself—something into which she had been tricked by circumstances.

And yet she knew it was wrong to dislike, as she did, the notion of having to work for, and bring up, and act mother to, the Johnstone baby. Very soon, almost all her sense of wrong-doing attached itself to this dislike.

She longed to go to service again, though she should have to pay her mother half the money she got to take care of this child and bring him up. And how soon could she make interest for his being got into some orphan school? Then she could go

abroad and see him no more. Better by half never to set her eyes upon her own son again than have that other woman's son always beside her !

CHAPTER IV.

It was nearly the end of July when Maria Jane Aird, getting out of an omnibus, passed through Kensington Square to her mother's lodgings.

She was expected. Her sister, a girl of fourteen, ran and snatched up the baby, and, thrusting him almost into her face, expatiated on his good temper, and demanded her eulogies in the same breath. "Ain't he grown?" she exclaimed, giving him a sounding kiss.

The mother, having greeted her daughter, turned again at once to the ironing-board and looked away, while Mrs. Aird, without taking the child, gazed at him with earnest, anxious attention.

"What ails you?" asked her sister.

"He's so changed," she murmured.

The thing sat boldly up, and stared at her—she stared at him.

Though it was a hot night, she began to shiver; she remembered so well the two babes she had parted from, and all the small but unmistakable particulars of feature and countenance in which they differed; but this differed from both.

This little fellow had a certain small amount of speculation in his bead-like blue eyes; he was more than five months old. He clutched the little sister's hair, and tried to suck it; when she tossed him up, he uttered an ecstatic squeal to express approval; he turned his head when he heard the click of the iron as it was set down; when she took him in her arms he cried, for his dawning intelligence seemed to assure him that she was a stranger.

She had thought incessantly on the two children ever since they had been taken from her. This child was not the least like her faithful recollection of either.

“By my not knowing him,” she reflected, “I am sure he is not mine; mine I shall certainly know, and I shall never rest till I’ve seen him.”

“He kicks ever so when he wants me to put him down,” observed the zealous little sister; “he likes to lie on the floor on the woolly mat.”

Mrs. Pearson then came forward to show off some of his accomplishments; he took a great deal of notice, it appeared.

“Toss him up and make him laugh, ‘Lizabeth.’” No sooner said than done. The baby crowed and cooed, and showed his toothless gums, and, at the sight of this reality, her remembrance faded away.

She took him and pressed him to her bosom with a sort of yearning, for he might be hers; but she soon put him down again, for—oh, strange uncertainty, he might not!

The baby, the two sisters, and their mother, all slept in one room that night; there was but one other—the living-room,

which also served for a kitchen. There was scant opportunity for such conversation as the young widow might have been supposed to long for with her mother; but it was characteristic of both the women that, so far from wishing to talk, they dreaded to be alone together. The mother, having for so many years kept her own secret, felt a kind of resentment against her favourite child for having been so tardy, so unwilling to take a hint as to have at last forced it from her; the daughter feared to ask a direct question, lest her mother should prevaricate in her answer, and so make her feel doubtful evermore in spite of any protestations that might come after. No, she should certainly find her own child less altered; she should know him easily enough. She would wait, and in the meantime try to be good to this one.

Some weeks after this the Johnstones came back to London for a short time preparatory to an autumnal sojourn at the seaside, and Mrs. Johnstone received a letter,

which she thought a very nice one. She was quite well herself, and her little girls were well, so was the baby—indeed, he had never been otherwise.

“Madam,” ran the letter, “I have long been perfectly recovered, and hope never to forget how good you have been to me. I came home some time ago and found my baby very well under mother’s charge.

“Madam, I feel such a great wish to see your dear babe; might I take the liberty to come some morning to set my eyes upon him? I hope he was none the worse for my being ill so suddenly. Hoping to hear from you, madam, I am,

“Your humble servant,

“MARIA JANE AIRD.”

“Kindly creature!” said Mrs. Johnstone, handing over the letter to her husband. “Many women feel a great love for their foster-children. I shall be pleased to show baby to her.”

So one morning, about the end of September,

Mrs. Aird was shown up into the nursery at Upper Harley Street. She was to dine there and spend the day. Mrs. Johnstone brought her up herself. The boy was asleep in his cradle; he was a great, fat, heavy child, almost half as big again as the active, lean little fellow she had left at home. She had all but made up her mind—the want of maternal yearning towards the baby at home having persuaded her most of all—yet she longed to recognize this child, and so be sure for ever. She fully looked for certainty, but this child also was so much changed, that, as she stood looking at him, she could not help shedding tears. He awoke, rosy and cross, and would not come to her, and she knew she must now tell all to her mother, and get the real truth from her, or else for ever be uncertain which was which. She looked round at the pretty little sisters; there was no special likeness between him and them; just so she had recalled all her own and her husband's relatives as far as

she had known them in childhood, and she found no decisive likeness to either child there. The children were both fair, both blue eyed ; this was a fine fat baby, but then he had never been ill. The other had had an attack of scarlatina, had been pulled down by it, and was not fat ; that was all.

Maria Aird did not get out of the omnibus which brought her to Kensington High Street till about seven o'clock in the evening ; the day had been hot and the street was more shady than dusk, though the weather was remarkably overcast.

As she walked on, she saw a stretcher preceding her. It was borne on the shoulders of four policemen, who were pacing carefully along. At first she knew not what was upon it—it was something brown. Then suddenly it revealed itself plainly to her—a woman's gown. Yes, poor creature, it was a woman.

Bandages were swathed round and round her and the stretcher, but she did not move

or show any sign of life. Mrs. Aird could make out her figure, and, as she went on, still the stretcher preceded her up a street, through the square, then down another street, then to the little court where she lived, and there—oh, terror! it stopped at her mother's door.

A cry from within echoed her agonized voice without, "Oh, mother, mother!"

The dull misery of the day was as nothing, now this more acute agony absorbed all her thoughts.

The poor patient was carried to her bed, and her daughters were told of her having been run over in one of the narrow streets near, and from the first, having been insensible, showing in her face no expression of pain.

A kindly neighbour proposed to take charge of the baby for the night. The young widow let him go, scarcely looking at him; she remembered every few minutes, with a flash of fear, that she might now perhaps

never be able to ask the question on which so much depended. She loved her mother, and between this love and this fear it seemed as if nothing could exhaust her. That night and the next day, and through the next night, her untiring eyes kept watch ; her unwearied hands were busy about the silent patient.

Sometimes a little better, there would seem to be intelligence in her mother's eyes, then again there would be a wandering and aimless gaze.

The daughters were told to hope, and hope assisted in sustaining them ; but as yet no communication was possible. At last Maria Jane Aird felt that she could do no more, and left her place by the bed-side to her sister.

Another weary day and night passed, still they were told to hope ; then, just at dawn, the tired sister crept to Maria's bed and woke her with, " Mother has spoken quite sensibly several times ;" and she got up, and

came to take her turn at the nursing. The red flush and solemn light of sunrise was on the ceiling, and seemed to be cast down on her mother's pallid and wasted features. She saw at once an improvement of a certain kind, but the face was no longer calm; she laid her hand gently on her mother's, saying, in a soothing tone, "You must be quite still, mother dear, and not fuss yourself about anything—there's no occasion."

Such a commonplace reply,—“Me not fuss, and your silk gown gone to the pawnbroker's?”

“Don't trouble about that, dear mother.”

“And your watch—I heard you both express that you'd do it when you did not think I noticed.”

“Well, mother dear, I can get them out when you're better,” said the daughter soothingly.

“I—I never loved to see the dawn, I told *him*—told *him* that lie, just at the dawn.”

“It did no harm in the ending of it,

mother dear," she answered, understanding her instantly.

"Then it—it don't signify, Maria, my girl?"

"No, nothing signifies but your getting well."

"And where's the child?"

"I paid fourpence to have him taken care of for to-night.—Mother?"

"Ay, my girl."

"The child—we were talking of the child. *Is he mine?*"

She leaned down with a face full of earnest entreaty and anguish; the mother gasped, and seemed to make an effort to speak.

"Is he mine?" murmured the daughter.
"Did you change him, mother? Say yes, or say no."

And yet neither could be said. There seemed to be some effort first to speak, then some effort to bear in mind the matter that should be spoken of, and after that the little

glimpse of sense and reason was gone. The daughter thought she whispered, "*Some other time*;" then her eyes closed, and the falacious hope of recovery was over.

It was about a month after this that Mrs. Johnstone got another letter from Mrs. Aird, and was touched by the simple filial love and grief that breathed through it. Her dear mother, the best of parents, had been knocked down by a cab in the street on the very day that the writer had spent in Upper Harley Street, and had met with injuries to her head. The last sentence Mrs. Johnstone read without any thought of the anguish which had wrung it from the writer, or of how much it concerned herself.

"She died, and, O madam! there were words I longed above all things to hear from her poor lips, and she could not say them."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Johnstone, quietly laying the letter aside, "I like that young woman; there's something so open and sincere about her."

"But I rather think this is meant for

a begging letter, my dear," observed Mr. Johnstone; "this is rather a telling sentence as to her not being able to maintain herself in service again on account of the *burden* of her young child."

He had a newspaper in his hand, and, as he spoke, he looked down and aside from it at the little Donald, who was now seven months old, and was crowing and kicking on the rug—a puppy nestling close to him, and receiving meekly various soft infantile thumps from his fat little fist. A red setter, the mother of the puppy, looked on with a somewhat dejected air, as if she knew her offspring was honoured by the notice of this child of the favoured race, but yet could have wished those dimpled hands would respect her treasure's eyes. Mr. Johnstone, from looking at his heir, got to whistling to him. "You're a burden—a very sore burden," he said, smiling, to him; "did you know that?"

The baby stared at him, understanding the good-will in his pleasant face, but nothing more. He was old enough already to

answer the paternal expression, and presently he smiled all over his little face.

As long as only the puppy had been procurable as a playmate, he had been contented with it; but now, conceiving hope of a more desirable slave, he made vigorous efforts to turn himself over, and, clutching his father's foot, soon got himself taken up, and began forthwith to amuse himself and make himself agreeable according to his lights, dashing his hand into his father's breakfast-cup, and, when this had been withdrawn and dried, seizing various envelopes, dropping them on the floor, and beginning to crow and screech with the peculiar ecstasy of a baby in full action, while he worked his arms and legs about, reckless of the trouble it was to prevent him from wriggling off. Meanwhile Mrs. Johnstone smiled with some quiet enjoyment, and carefully removed all the knives and all the crockery out of his reach.

"Well, love," she said at last, "have you had enough of it?" Thereupon Mr.

Johnstone called to the dog, "Die, ring the bell;" and the setter walked forth from under the table, and, grasping the bell-handle in both paws, pulled it down, while his master, still struggling with the baby, exclaimed, "This boy has more life in him than all the girls put together. I defy any fellow to hold him, and take care of him without giving his whole mind to it and to nothing else."

"There goes the milk!" said the mother; "I did not think he could have reached it. Look, my baby, dear! does baby know what he has done?"

"He looks as if he did; the sapient air he gives himself is something wonderful. It is evident that a man-child from the first is different from girl babies. What shall I do with you, my son, when you are older?"

"Don't afflict thyself, love," said his wife, caressing his hand; "he is just like the others; but you know you were never in the habit of having them downstairs at breakfast

time, nor of otherwise troubling yourself with the charge of them."

The nurse now appeared, and had no sooner carried off Master Donald Johnstone, and shut the door behind her, than Die the setter started up with several little yaps of satisfaction, and, seizing her puppy by the neck, deposited it in Mrs. Johnstone's lap. The setter knew very well that her puppy was a thing of no account when the baby was present, and she sometimes testified her dissatisfaction, and expressed her sensation of dulness in his society, and the neglect it brought her, by uttering a loud and somewhat impertinent yawn. Now she was happy, and probably thought things were as they should be ; her puppy had curled himself up in the upstart baby's place, and she was watching him, with her chin upon her master's foot.

Mr. Johnstone was a man about thirty-four years of age ; he was about the middle height ; in complexion he inclined to fairness ;

he was neither handsome nor plain ; he walked much more like a soldier than a civilian, and he had one remarkably agreeable feature—his eyes, which were of a bright light hazel, had a charming power of expressing affection and frankness. He was a man whom everybody liked, and most of all those who had the most to do with him. People who made his acquaintance often found themselves attached to him before they had discovered why.

Mrs. Johnstone, on the other hand, was much above the middle height ; she had not one good feature, and yet she was exceedingly admired by the other sex, and had been won, with great difficulty, by her husband from several other suitors who sighed for her. She had that hair which, of all the varieties called red, is alone beautiful. It was so light and bright that it crowned her like a glory, and she had blue eyes and thick light eyelashes.

An easy, cordial manner, and that

observant tact which always characterize a much-admired woman, were in her case mingled with real sweetness of nature and wish to do kindness. These good qualities, however, by no means accounted for the love which had been lavished on her. That must be indeed an unamiable woman whose lovers can find no good quality to quote in excuse, or perhaps as a reason (!), for the extravagance of their love. Mr. Johnstone had never raved about her virtues; that was, perhaps, because he had taken them all for granted; and when, after some months of marriage, he discovered that her charm was an abiding one, and that she was just as sensible, just as devoted, and no more extravagant than other men's wives, he could hardly believe in his own good fortune. He also showed himself a sensible man. Of course she was lovely—most men thought so—but he never had her photographed. Photographs deal with facts, and when the photograph showed him rather a long upper lip, eyes by no means

lustrous, and a nose neither Roman nor Grecian, he destroyed it, all but one copy, which he intended to keep carefully hidden for himself, and begged her never to be photographed again.

Then she laughed, but not without a certain tenderness, and said, "Oh, Donald, what a goose you are!"

"Do you think so, my dear?" he answered, still looking at the portrait rather ruefully, and then at her as she sat by him on a sofa.

"Of course," she answered, looking him straight in the face, as if lost in contemplation.

"Well?" he asked.

"And yet I always did—and I suppose I always shall—think you the only man worth mentioning."

But that little scene had been long over at the time when Die the setter put her puppy into Mrs. Donald Johnstone's lap. A discussion took place which concerned Mrs.

Aird, and which ended in a handsome present of money being sent her by post-office order, with a letter from Mrs. Johnstone, who told her that, if ever she did go to service again, she might depend on a good character from her as an honest, sober, cleanly, and thoroughly trustworthy person.

Having written this kind letter, and shown herself just as able as most of us judge of character—that is, just as unable to divide manner from conduct, to make allowance for overwhelming circumstance, and bridge over the wide gap, in her thoughts, which rends apart the interests of the rich from those of the poor—Mrs. Johnstone almost forgot Maria Aird. She had a letter of thanks from her, but she was never asked for the “character;” the very dangerous illness which had caused her to want this young woman’s services, and the loss of her little girl, began alike to recede into the background of her thoughts. She could think of her precious little Irene

without tears. Her two little girls were healthy and happy, her boy was growing fast, and she was shortly hoping to add another boy to her little tribe. Of course it was to be a boy; her husband's great desire for sons always made her feel as if her girls were failures. He was fond of them, and imagined that he made no difference between one and another of his children; but his little daughters, though by no means able to express a contrary opinion, not only held it, but would certainly have justified it, if they had known how; they shared their father's views, and considered that their "boy-baby" enhanced their own dignity.

It was about the longest day; Mr. Johnstone, coming home to dinner, was advancing along Upper Harley Street on foot, when a young man, who seemed to be loitering along, looking out for some one, met him and suddenly stopped short without addressing him.

Mr Johnstone for the moment stopped short also.

“Sir,” said the man, turning as he went on, and walking beside him, “I am aware that I am speaking to Mr. Johnstone.”

“Certainly you are: what do you want with me?”

He paused, for he had reached his own steps. He had spoken with the brusque manner that an officer uses in addressing a soldier. He now looked the young man straight in the face, and saw, to his surprise, the signs of great and varying emotion, and a strange flush of anger or shame. “Not drunk,” thought Mr. Johnstone. The man looked at him, and at that instant the footman answered his master’s knock.

“Well?” said Mr. Johnstone.

“I can’t say it,” exclaimed the young fellow; and, turning round, he almost ran away.

“Queer!” thought the lawyer, and he entered his own house, pondering on the

matter; but he soon forgot it, for Mrs. Johnstone was not at all well.

In the course of a few hours there was another infantile failure in Upper Harley Street.

The father, intensely grateful for this endeared wife's safety, went to bed in broad daylight; but, first putting his head out of the open window to inhale the early air, he saw, looking up—but it flitted away almost at once—a female figure that seemed familiar to him. Surely that was the nurse—the young widow, Mrs. Aird? Odd of her to be gazing up at his window at three o'clock in the morning—and with her was (or he was very much mistaken) the identical young man who had accosted him in the street, and then so suddenly taken himself off!

Mr. Johnstone closed the window, and very soon fell asleep, looked down upon by hundreds of cabbage roses—for this was the same room where Mrs. Aird had been sitting

with his boy-baby when the telegram came in that sent them out of the house.

A few days had passed, Mrs. Johnstone was said to be "as well as could be expected," when one evening, just as he had dined, her husband was told that a young man wanted to speak with him.

The young man had been shown into a library at the back of the house, the light was already going, but Mr. Johnstone recognized him instantly.

"You accosted me in the street the other day?"

"Yes, sir."

The clear hazel eyes looked straight at him; his next speech seemed to be in answer to them,—“I am not come here to deceive you, sir.”

CHAPTER V.

MR. JOHNSTONE rang the bell, and a shaded lamp was brought in. The young man did not speak till the servant had shut the door; then, looking at Mr. Johnstone as he stood on the rug, "I should wish to prevent mistakes," he began.

"You had better sit down," was the answer.

The young man sat down. "I am not come to ask your professional aid, sir," he continued; "I know this ain't the place to do it in, and I know you've nothing to do with criminal cases either. But, sir, it is a crime that I'm come to speak of. Well—no, I don't know what it is, and nobody else does."

Here Mr. Johnstone naturally felt some

astonishment, and his clear, keen eyes held the young man so completely under their control that he seemed to find nothing to say, but to repeat his former assurance.

“I am not come here to deceive you, sir—why should I? I might have kept away and never said a word. But, oh, it’s hard upon me that I should have it to do!”

“It seems to me that you have to accuse some one else, then?” said his host, intending to help him.

“Yes.”

“By the way you express yourself, I gather that the crime, whatever it may be, is not committed yet? It might be a burglary, for instance, projected but not accomplished?”

“Oh, no, sir, no—they were both as honest as the day, poor things!”

“Women, then?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, man, speak out!”

“Speak out!” repeated the young man passionately; “speak out! when it’s my own

wife, that I haven't been married to three weeks, and when I don't know what you'll do to her? Speak out! If you'd ever loved a woman as I love her, you'd—you'd be more merciful, sir."

Excited as the young man was, he perceived at once that this exclamation was, in the ears of his listener, absolutely absurd. Donald Johnstone had, as if involuntarily, lifted his eyes; they rested on the wall, behind where the young husband had been ordered to sit. He saw for a moment, in their clear depth, not the assertion, but the evidence, of a passionate love which, even in the first freshness of his own, brought his thoughts to a pause. Then there was something deliberate in their withdrawal which checked the young man's desire to glance behind him. Something like a flash of displeasure met his gaze. He perceived that he was supposed to have taken a liberty. There was no answer to his speech; he must begin again as well as he could.

“It’s my wife and her mother,” he said in a low voice, “that I’ve come to speak of—what one of them did, as we are afraid (for, mark you, sir, we are not sure)—what one of them did, and the other let to be done—what one of them did, and then died, and we think wanted to speak of first, but could not find the words.”

“Your wife and her mother?” repeated Mr. Johnstone with a weighty calm; “and you feel that you must lay it before some one? You want advice—is that it?”

“No, sir, not advice; my wife wants forgiveness, if you could forgive her.”

Mr. Johnstone looked surprised, but not at all alarmed.

The young man wiped his forehead. “I fell in love with her when she had her widow’s cap on a full year ago,” he said; “but, when I offered to her, she would not have me. I was so fond of her; I said, ‘I ain’t capable of taking a denial without a reason.’ Then she says, ‘Have the reason: *I’ve some-*

thing on my mind.' Her name was Maria Jane Aird."

Mr. Johnstone was not surprised; he remembered how he had seen this young woman when he looked out of the window in the night. Pity for the husband arose in his mind.

"She was in a situation of trust," he said, "and I am afraid you mean that she abused it?"

"Yes, sir—alas! she did. But at that time she would not tell me what her fault was. You, may be, would not hold to your wish to take me,' was all she said, 'if you knew what I have on my mind;' but I did hold to it—I could not help it—and she never did speak, though, in the end, she married me."

His distress was such that Mr. Johnstone tried to help him again.

"And then she probably told you that she had unfortunately taken something of value out of this house—some jewel, perhaps? If

so, you are come to return it? Well, I pity you, and I forgive her."

"Bless you, sir!" exclaimed the young man, quite impatient at his calm; "I told you they were honest. Sir, don't make it harder for me and yourself too. You will have it that this thing is nothing to you. It is; I think, if you would sit down, I could speak better; won't you, sir? There, that's it! I'm talking of my wife, Maria; she was wet-nurse here."

"Yes."

"And you sent her away from the house with your baby?"

"Yes."

Now, at last, something like fear began to show itself in Donald Johnstone's face, but it was a vague fear.

"You never ought to have done it, sir."

"He was quite well," answered the father, amazed and pale, "quite well all the time; he cannot have met with any injury? She must have done her duty by him."

“ You should not have done it,” repeated the young man. “ As I make out, you were so afraid of an illness you had in the house that you never came near him or set your eyes on him for two or three months ; and how were you to judge, when you had a child back, whether it was the same ? Sir, sit down ; don’t look like that ! There ! it’s quite possible the children were not changed.”

“ Changed ! ” exclaimed the father, shuddering.

“ I’m sure I don’t know how to tell it you, but my poor wife, all on a sudden, was taken very ill, and sent for her mother, who came with the baby—Maria’s baby. Maria did not see either of the children again, being so ill. I don’t know how to tell it you, but I’m afraid that woman, wishing her own grandchild in a better position—I am afraid those children were changed.”

No need now to tell the father to take this thing seriously ; he trembled from head to foot and could not speak.

“ But we shall never know,” proceeded the young man. “ ‘ *Is the other child living ?* ’ I seem to think you would ask. Yes, sir, and as well as can be.”

“ It’s impossible your wife should be in any doubt,” exclaimed the other, recovering his voice and starting up, white to the lips. “ Impossible she should not know ! She must know, she does know, whether this wicked, base, cruel crime was perpetrated or not. And what makes her even suspect such a thing ? ” he added, sinking back faint between his passion and his despair.

“ Her mother many times tempted her to do it, sir, and was angry with her because she would not,” said the young man in a deprecating tone. “ They had words, and Maria was angry with her mother too.”

“ No, that story won’t do. Angry with her, and then send for her, and leave her alone with all opportunity to do her worst ? ”

“ It seems bad, sir,” continued the young

man with studied gentleness and patience. "And it's only a fancy of Maria's that she might have done it. We haven't the least proof, Mr. Johnstone."

"If she connived at it, she is a wretch, as lost to all justice and mercy as her mother."

"And that's what lies so heavy on her mind," said the husband, still in a low, deprecatory voice.

"How did she tell it you? Let me know the worst—for heaven's sake let me hear it all!"

"We had but been married three days, and it was Sunday. Maria was putting the little chap's coat on. I says, 'He's a credit to you, Maria.' 'He'll be my punishment before he's done,' she makes answer; 'for, David, *this child is what I have on my mind.*' She was kneeling on the ground; she put on her things, but you may think we did not go to church that morning. I carried the child into Richmond park (I live and

have my trade at Richmond). There we sat down, and I said, 'Maria, my dear, it's now time to speak. I've often seen you fret—and so it's concerning your child?' 'Yes,' she makes answer again, 'for I give you my plain word for it—and what I say I mean, David—I don't know whether he's mine or not.' "

It will be observed that this version of the story was not the true one, for Maria Aird did change the children. All her doubt was as to what her mother had done, otherwise she would have known well enough that the child her second husband was so willing to be good to was not hers. The young man, however, did his best to make the thing plain; he gave the version he had received. His wife's sorrow and repentance were genuine—this he had perceived at once; and that she was capable of fretting over her fault, and yet misrepresenting it, never entered his head. She screened herself at the expense of the dead. He never supposed

that her misery, in the sense of this uncertainty, was half owing to her doubt as to whether or not she had secured a better lot in life for her child in return for her own distress of mind. If she had been sure this was the case, she would have felt herself repaid ; but to have lost her own child utterly, and yet to have no reward—to be unable to love the one she had in her arms, and yet not be sure that she did not owe him a mother's love—was more than her half-awakened conscience could bear. She had turned herself out of the paradise of innocence ; she had gathered the apple and not tasted its sweetness : how was she to know what a common experience this is ? How could she suppose that the promised good in evil was all a cheat, and that she should find nothing but bitterness in it from the very first ?

The everlasting lie had been uttered to her also.

There was silence now, and the young

man did not dare to break it. His heart was beating more freely, for the dreaded words had been said. He felt a strange consciousness of the picture that he knew was hanging behind him; but, though Donald Johnstone's head was bowed into his hands, it seemed impossible to turn and look at it. But this poor gentleman was thinking of her whom it represented. "Oh, my wife!" the young man heard him murmur. The words gave him a lump in his throat; he longed to be dismissed; he thought of rising, and proposing to take his leave, but did not see his way to this. How long would Mr. Johnstone sit with his face in his hands?

Mr. Johnstone lifted it up at last, and the young man had never been so astonished in his life as he was at the tone and manner, at the most unexpected words, and the most keen expression of countenance with which he accosted him.

"What is your name, Mr. David——?"

"My name is David Collingwood, sir."

“And what is your calling, Mr. David Collingwood?”

“I’m a carpenter, sir, the same as Maria’s first husband was.”

“Oh! Have you any thought of going abroad—of emigrating?”

“Yes, sir!” exclaimed the young man, very much astonished; “that’s what I think of doing as soon as ever I can. I’m saving money for it.”

“I thought so!”

“Sir?”

“A child would be a great burden to you on a voyage.”

“So Maria has always said, sir.”

“She has, has she? Mr. David Collingwood?”

“Yes, sir?”

“You know nothing of me?”

“No, I don’t.”

“For instance, as to whether I am a man of my word or no?”

Mr. David Collingwood here began to look

a little alarmed ; involuntarily he glanced towards the window.

His host was looking straight at him.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said again, coming close to Mr. David Collingwood’s thought. “I have no intention of throwing you out of that !”

David Collingwood rose quietly,—“Sir, I’ve said what I had to say.”

“Yes, but you have not heard what I have to say !”

“No, sir, but I can’t make out what you should have to say as I need be afraid of !”

“Why are you afraid, then ?”

“I’m not !” said the carpenter, but he trembled.

“Do I look like a man who may be expected to keep to what I say ?”

“Yes, you do.”

“Well, I say, then, if you will confess to me that all you have said to-night is a lie—”

“A lie !” shouted the man.

“Yes, a lie, and that you—not unnaturally

—feeling what a burden this child will be to you, and hoping to get rid of him, have persuaded your wife—”

“ A lie ! ” shouted the man again, almost in a rage.

“ Have persuaded your wife to bear you out in this story, I will give you, David Collingwood, two hundred pounds, and no man out of this room shall ever hear a word of the matter.”

“ Why, what good would that do ? ” cried the carpenter, so much astonished that it almost overcame his anger.

Mr. Johnstone was silent. There was a long pause.

“ It wouldn’t help me to get rid of the child,” reasoned David Collingwood at last, almost remonstrating with him, “ because, anyhow, one of them must be my wife’s, and thereby one of them must be on my hands to bring up.”

“ You don’t think so ? ”

“ Don’t I, sir ? ” said the carpenter, almost

helplessly, and with an air of puzzlement indescribable.

“ No, you are just as well aware as I am that, rather than let you two take over to Australia—(you a step-father, as you are, and she a worse than step-mother, as she must be, whether her tale is true or false, and whether the boy is hers or not)—rather than let you two carry away for ever a child who may be my child, I shall take him off your hands—do you hear me?—take him off your hands and bring him up myself. Do you mean to tell me you have not thought of this and counted on it ? ”

David Collingwood trembled visibly.

“ I may have gone so far as to think—” he began.

“ To think what ? ”

“ That maybe I should do so if I was you, sir, and one of the children was mine.”

“ And what did your wife say when she and you talked it over together ? ”

“ We never did talk it over together.”

“ You never said to her, then, that if you two stuck to this tale, the child was secure of a good bringing up ? ”

“ No, I didn’t.”

“ She never wept over the boy, and said it would be a sore distress to her to part with him ? ”

“ No, she didn’t ; she has not a mother’s feelings for him, because of her doubt.”

“ Well, David Collingwood, I offer you two hundred pounds to confess that this is all a lie, and a plot between you and your wife to get rid of her child.”

David Collingwood was silent.

“ I should only add one condition—that is, that you would stay here, in this room, till after I have seen your wife, and seen her alone. I should tell her of your confession, and then you have my word for silence ever after.”

“ My wife would be frightened out of her senses ! ”

“ Why ? ”

“ She thinks, and I was afeard, you would have the law of her—take her up and prosecute her for what she’s done.”

“ But she did not do it.”

David Collingwood was sitting down with arms folded ; he had looked very much puzzled, and sat long silent. At last he lifted his face, and when Mr. Johnstone saw its expression, he involuntarily sighed.

“ I’ve had mean thoughts in my mind, like other men,” he began. “ Sir, you may go to my wife, if you have a mind, for I think you have a right so to do. In short, come what may, I don’t see, now I’ve once spoken, what I’ve got it in my power to do for her. Yes, you may go, of course, to her ; it ain’t in my power to prevent it. I seem to observe now what you mean, sir. If I would own to a lie, it would what you lawyer gentlemen call discredit me as a witness, and then you could get alone with my wife, and perhaps make her tell you a

different tale, and so you'd buy your own son, and be sure you'd got him. But I say—"

"Yes, David Collingwood."

"I say, be hanged to your two hundred pounds! If my poor wife has done you the base wrong she says she has—(well, I mean the wrong she owns to have let her mother do, wishing and hoping it was done)—that money ain't of any use. It is only of use in case she has told you and me a lie. I may have had a mean thought as well as another man, but I'm not a villain. You want, by means of that money, to bring out the falseness of the tale. It cuts me very sharp to say it to you—the tale's not false; worse luck! it's true."

No answer to this. Donald Johnstone, looking straight before him, very pale, but not convinced, was searching over his recollections. David Collingwood went on,—

"She never told me this that was on her mind through any thought that I should up and tell it to you. It slipped out along of her

feeling how fond I was of her, and to relieve her own mind. She cannot keep a secret. And when I broke to her that it must be told to you, she fell into a great faint, and said you would take her up and she should be imprisoned. Through that I went to a lawyer."

"Oh! you did?"

"Well, I did, sir, and told him all except the names and the places. If he had said you could and would prosecute, you would never have heard a word from me. He said, 'The weak place is'—but you know what it is, sir."

"Go on."

"'What is the woman afraid of?' he said; 'there is no witness—not one! The person is dead that is accused of having probably done this thing.' 'I was afraid she might be prosecuted for a conspiracy,' said I. 'No,' said he, 'there was no conspiracy.' 'It's her opinion,' said I, 'that it's more than likely the thing was done.' 'But,' said he, 'she cannot be prosecuted for an

opinion, and one that, if she is frightened, she is not obliged to stick to. If there had been any evidence whatever, but what is to come out of her own mouth—if she had ever breathed a word of this, or if the other woman had—’ ”

Here he paused.

“ Then the supposed father might have brought an action in hope of obtaining more evidence—more witnesses—was that it? How do you know that I shall not do so even now ? ”

“ Well, I satisfied him fully, and had to pay for it. I satisfied him that the thing—the whole of it—was in my wife’s mind and nowhere else.”

“ And then you went home and told her you believed it? What was the lawyer’s name?”

“ Oh, sir, you’ll excuse me.”

“ You paid for his information—I am willing to pay for mine.”

“ I couldn’t tell you, sir.”

“ If he was a respectable man, he told you,

first, that he would have nothing to do with the case ; and, secondly, that he believed it was a got-up story intended to extort money from an unfortunate father. He advised you to drop it, and said you were playing with edge-tools."

David Collingwood's look of astonishment and intense dismay seemed to show that something very like this had actually been said to him ; he sat silent and became angry. Donald Johnstone never took his eyes off him, but, with a pang not to be described, he saw the astonishment subside, the anger fade away, and the young man said meeting his gaze with tolerable firmness.

"And what do you think yourself, sir ? Do you think it is a got-up story ?"

"I don't know what to think."

"No, sir ; and as to your wanting to turn it against me, you've met with such a cruel wrong that I should be a brute if I couldn't take it patiently—only—I've met with a wrong too, sir."

“This concerns my own son—my only son. By what you say, I am never to know—never can know—whether the child I am bringing up is my child or not.”

“And you’ve tried one way and another to find out whether I’ve lied, and you have a right—I know it cuts—but it doesn’t cut you only.”

“No, I am truly sorry for you, David Collingwood. *If this is true—*”

“For she’s not what I thought she was, and I’ve only been married to her three weeks.”

He broke down here, and shed tears, but the other had no tears; he was extremely pale, and he trembled as he sat looking at the portrait on the wall with unspeakable love and almost despair.

David Collingwood sat some time trying in vain to recover himself. Not a word was spoken, his host knew neither what to say nor what to do. How should he tell this beloved wife, who had almost died to give him birth,

that he knew not whether their one son was theirs or not? how should he bear it himself? Suddenly a bright hope came into his mind. The other child might prove to have no likeness whatever to himself or to his other children; he might prove to be specially unlike them. At least there would be comfort in this if he did.

David Collingwood spoke while he was deep in this flattering hope. He rose and said sullenly, "What do you want me to do, sir? It's late—my wife—"

"Your wife will be uneasy?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am afraid that on this one occasion you cannot consider her feelings."

"What am I to do, then?"

"I am going to Richmond. It is essential that I should see her before you do."

"I never said she was at Richmond; she is in the street, waiting for me."

"And the child with her?"

"No, sir, she's alone."

“Then you stay in this room and I will call her in.”

“You may turn the lock on me, sir, if you please.”

Donald Johnstone put on his hat, left the young husband, and, opening the front door, looked keenly right and left. There was not far to look: a woman in black, near at hand, was dejectedly pacing on. As she came absolutely to the foot of his door-steps, he descended and looked straight into her eyes. She stood and gazed as if fascinated, the colour fading out of her face, and her hands clenching themselves.

“You—you won’t prosecute me?” she entreated helplessly, and stammering as her mother had done.

“No, you base woman,” he answered, “because it would be useless. Come here!”

“Must I—oh, sir!—must I come in?”

She entered. He was even then mindful of his invalid upstairs, and shut the door most deliberately and gently behind him;

then he entered the dining-room, locked the door, put up the gas, and turned. She had followed him but a little way into the room, and was already on her knees; her terror was far from simulated, and his quickness of observation showed him in an instant that no probable fault of her dead mother's could ever have brought that ashen pallor and deadly fright into her face.

“Maria Collingwood,” he began, almost in a whisper, as he stood leaning slightly towards her and looking straight down into her eyes, “you have told lies to your husband—do you hear me?—lies!”

Her white lips murmured something, but it hardly seemed to be a denial. She was kneeling upright, and with folded hands.

“But you may look for all mercy that is possible from me, if you will now speak the truth.”

This was far from the way in which he had intended to begin. Her own face had brought his accusation upon her. She

stammered out, "He—he would hate me ; he—he would cast me off, if—if I did. Oh, have mercy !" Then she *had* deceived her husband ; there was no plot, the man was her dupe.

"I will have mercy if you tell me all the truth."

"And he shall not know ?" she moaned.

"I'll give you no time for meditation, and for the inventing of fresh lies ; unless you speak, and instantly, he shall know what you have already said ; but if you speak, and I feel that you speak the truth, he shall not."

And then, at a sign from him, she rose, took the chair he pointed to, and told all her miserable story in few words.

Donald Johnstone ground his teeth together in the agonizing desire to keep himself silent, lest he should frighten back the truth, and never have a chance of hearing it more. He allowed all to be told—her temptation, her yielding, her illness, her intention of

sending away the wrong child, and then her doubt as to what her mother had done. All, he perceived, depended on what had been the mother's opinion. She had no conscience.

“And you incline to think this second villainy was accomplished—why?”

“Mother couldn't look at me, sir, when I got home.”

“And, on the other hand?”

“On the other hand, when I saw the baby here, I seemed to think he was the most like what I remembered of mine.”

CHAPTER VI.

THAT was a miserable night for Donald Johnstone. It was twelve o'clock before the guilty woman and her husband were sent away—David Collingwood almost with kindness, and his wife without one word. The possible father had got what he wanted—two distinct tales, differing from one another, but, as he listened to the details of the second, he shared in the unsolvable doubt.

He ordered David Collingwood to bring the child the next morning, and, having dismissed the pair, he sat till daylight filtered in between the leaves of the shutters, and could not decide what to do further.

It was the doubt that mastered him and confused his mind. And what father in real life, or in any true history, had gone

through such an experience as would be a guide to him ? He was the victim of an unknown crime—as truly unknown in life as well known in the penny theatres. His distracted thoughts dragged him through all the phases of feeling, even to scornful laughter that left a lump in his throat. “Have you a mole on your left arm ?” asks the supposed father in *Punch*. “No !” “Then come to my arms, my long-lost son !”

He laughed bitterly, and could not help it ; then he moaned over his wife. How would she bear it, and how and when could he tell it to her ?

There was tragedy indeed here, and yet what a hateful, enraging smack of the ridiculous too ! He perceived that he could not possibly let such a story come out ; all London would ring with it. When the children were taken out with their nurses, people would collect at his door on purpose to look at them ! No, not a soul must hear of it. How, then, could he do

his duty, and satisfy his love towards his son ?

He was in his room only three hours or so. When he came down to breakfast, he said to the footman, " I have told Mrs. Aird to bring Master Donald's foster-brother here. When they come, show them in." He had a head-ache, and sighed bitterly as he sat down ; the hand trembled that poured out the coffee. The moment after, there was a modest knock at the door, and the little child who *perhaps* had so vast a claim on him was *perhaps* come to his rightful home.

He looked up ; David Collingwood and Maria Collingwood were standing stock still within the door. Maria did not lift up her eyes, she was mute and pale, and she held a lovely little boy in her arms.

" Put that child down," was all Mr. Johnstone could say ; and he did not rise from his place at the table. But, lo ! the small visitor, not troubled with any doubts or fears as to his welcome, no sooner found himself

on the floor than he began to trot towards the rug, on which was lying the old setter, with a puppy as usual. This one was about two months old. She seized him as the baby advanced, and slunk under the table. Then the pretty little fellow laughed, and showed a mouthful of pearls, pointing with his finger under the table.

“Boy did see doggy,” he said, fearlessly addressing the strange gentleman; then, coming straight up to him, he laid his dimpled hand on Mr. Johnstone’s knee, and stooped the better to see the dog.

“Up, up!” he next said in an entreating tone. Mr. Johnstone took him up on his knee with perfect gravity and gentleness, and looked at the man and woman who were standing motionless within the door. The man was trembling; the woman, white and frightened, held herself absolutely still. “You may go,” he said.

“One—for—Lancy,” lisped the child, pointing to some strawberries on a plate.

“ You may go,” repeated Mr. Johnstone ; he could not trust himself to say more.

“ Yes, sir ; when is she to come back for him ? ”

“ Never ! ”

“ One—for—Lancey,” repeated the child with sweet entreaty.

The possible father put one into his little hand.

“ I mean, sir, what are we to do—when is she to take him back ? ”

“ I know what you mean : I answer, *never!* ”

The young man whispered to his wife, and she, without once looking at the child, turned to the door. “ I wish you good morning, sir,” he said, and in another moment they were gone.

David Collingwood had caused his wife to spend money of his in dressing the little Lancey. The child was healthy and rosy, clean, well arrayed, and without the least shyness. He was a more beautiful little fellow than the treasure upstairs, but not

quite so big. He talked rather better ; his hair was a shade browner than that of the two little girls in the nursery. Little Donald's, on the contrary, was a shade lighter ; and there seemed to be no special likeness, in either child, to himself or to his wife.

Left alone with the little Lancey, all the pathos of the situation seemed to show itself to him. He could endure it well enough, he thought, for himself ; but, like many another sympathetic and affectionate man, he had already begun to suffer for his wife ; her supposed future feeling was worse to him than his own present distress. If he could be sure that she could bear it, he thought he could bear it very well.

Of course the child's face did not help him. At such an early age, children rarely show strong family likeness, unless the appearance of the parents is peculiar indeed.

When we see family likeness, which we constantly do, we think how natural it is ; but when we see family unlikeness, which

we also constantly do, it never costs us a moment's surprise, a moment's thought. In life, nobody is ever surprised if, or because, a brother and sister are diverse in feature, complexion, or character, and yet we all have a theory concerning family likeness, and generally it is an exaggerated one.

A fresh series of observations, if theory could be set aside, would perhaps show that strong likeness is almost always founded on peculiarity.

A man of average height, with no exaggerated feature, with somewhat light hair, grey or hazel eyes, and a certain freshness of complexion (neither pale nor ruddy), together with a figure rather firmly built, though not stout,—this description would suit many thousands of Englishmen; add a shade of auburn to the beard, and it would suit many thousands of Scotchmen; add a shade of blue to the eyes, and it would suit many thousands of Irishmen. These are the men who transmit national likeness.

But here and there you may meet a man with a nose like an eagle's beak, stalking about his fields with his young brood after him. In all probability, a like nose is in course of erection on their youthful faces. Or you fall in with a man who has a preposterously deep bass voice—too deep for ordinary life—much deeper, in fact, than he is himself—his children, more likely than not, echo that voice, sons and daughters both. Or you see a man, lanky, and so tall that, when he has done getting up, you think how conveniently he might be folded together like a yard measure, his children rise and step after him like storks. Ten to one his very baby is taller than it ought to be. Such men as these transmit family likeness.

The little Lancey soon slipped off Mr. Johnstone's knee, and began to talk and scold at the puppy, because he would not come and be friendly—in other words, to be tormented.

The old mother knew better than to leave

him to the tender mercies of a baby-boy. She rose, and, taking him in her mouth, walked slowly away round and round the table, the child following, and just not overtaking her. This game was going on when Mr. Johnstone caught sight of a parcel lying on a chair close to the door. He had told David Collingwood to ask his wife whether she had any photograph in her possession of her first husband—if so, to bring it.

He now cut open the little package, but there were no photographs in it, only two letters—one from a lady, giving an excellent character to *Maria Jane Pearson* as a housemaid, setting forth that she was honest, sober, and steady. It seemed to have been preserved as a gratifying testimony of approval, but did not bear on the present case. The other letter was from David Collingwood, and was as follows:—

“SIR,—As it ain’t in my power to say what I meant to say when I see you, along of

my feeling so badly about this matter, I write this to inform you that my wife has no portraits of her first husband, for he was very badly marked with small-pox, and never would be taken, and she says he had no brothers nor sisters, and his parents are not living. Herewith you will find her marriage lines. She has always kept herself respectable, and do assure me she never did wrong in her life but in the one thing you know of. And she humbly begs your pardon.

“I am, your obedient humble servant,

“DAVID COLLINGWOOD.”

A baby hand was on his knee again. He looked down; tears were on the little flushed cheeks; the long slow chase had been useless.

“Boy did want doggy,” he sobbed. Mr. Johnstone felt a sudden yearning, and a catch in his throat that almost overcame him. He took up the child, and pressed him to his breast. For a moment or two the child and the man wept together. He

soon recovered himself; it was a waste of emotion to suffer it to get the mastery now; there would come a day when he and his wife would weep together—that was the time to dread. He must save his courage, all his powers of consoling, flattering, encouraging, for that; the present was only his own distress—it was nothing.

There was rejoicing in the nursery upstairs that morning; the baby Aird, as he was called, had come to spend the day. He made himself perfectly at home; the little Johnstones produced all their toys for him. “What a credit he is to his mother!” said the nurse. “His clothes quite new, and almost as handsome as *our* children’s.”

David Collingwood, as he led his wife to the omnibus which was to take them home, could hardly believe his own good fortune. The child, “the encumbrance” that he had perforce taken with her, and had meant to do his duty by, had, contrary to all sober hope, been received into another man’s

house, and there he had been told to leave him. His wife, though confused and frightened, did not seem to feel any distress at parting with him.

“Is this all?” he repeated many times to himself as they went on. “Is this over?” “Is she truly going to get off scot-free?”

If so, the sooner he took her away the better. At the other side of the world he felt that he should have more chance of forgetting that which, while he remembered it, made his love for his young wife more bitter than sweet to him.

“Is it over?” No, it was not quite over. They got out of the omnibus at their own cottage door. A hansom cab stood there, and Mr. Johnstone was paying the cabman. He followed them in. Maria Collingwood sank into a chair. Mr. Johnstone, not unnaturally, declined one; he stood with a note-book in his hand. “If you’ve—you’ve altered your mind,” Maria began, “I’m willing, as is my duty, to take back the child.”

David Collingwood darted an indignant look at her, but Mr. Johnstone took no notice of the speech. Various questions were asked her, and answered; the husband weighed the effect of her answers as each was given: "He can make nothing of that;" "He can make little of that;" "He sees she speaks the truth there;" "He'll not give the boy back for that!"

He was mean, as he had said, but not base.

The little sister—Mr. Johnstone wanted her address. She was in a place: the address was given.

"Where was she when your mother came home with the child?"

"She was in a place then, and till a month after."

"Can you prove that?"

The matter was gone into. Donald Johnstone hoped then for a few moments, and David Collingwood feared; but their respective feelings were soon reversed, for Maria did prove it. The sister was in a place as

kitchen-girl at a school, and did not come home till it broke up for the holidays; consequently, she never saw the child till after her mother had brought him home to Kensington.

“Where did Mrs. Leach live?” Her address was given. It was asserted that she had never known there was more than one child under her roof; consequently, that she could not have harboured any sort of suspicion bearing on the case. “Where was the girl who had carried one of the children out?” David Collingwood had ascertained that she was dead. Mr. Johnstone stood long pondering on this matter; finally he took David Collingwood with him to the cottage of Mrs. Leach, and asked a few questions, which abundantly proved the truth of what Mrs. Aird had declared. He therefore said nothing to excite her astonishment; but gave her a present of money and withdrew.

Donald Johnstone came back to London in the course of the morning, and found the nurse who had lived in his family when the little

Donald was born. She was very comfortably married, and he agreed with her to take Master Donald's foster-brother under her charge for a little while. Mrs. Aird, he informed her, had married again, and he intended to be good to the child. Less could hardly be said; and what his own servants might think of this story, he considered it best to leave to themselves.

In the course of time, Mrs. Johnstone perfectly recovered, the London season was just over, and the quietest time of year was coming on.

The worst, though he did not know it, had already been endured. His anxiety as to its effect on her had so wrought on him that she had discovered it, and a heavy portion of it was already weighing on her own heart. It was necessary that she should now be told, and she was so fully conscious that a certain something—she knew not what—was the matter, that when he said she had something to hear which would disturb

her, she was quite relieved to find that he now thought her strong enough to know the worst.

She soon brought him to the point. It was not his health; it was nothing in his profession; it was no pecuniary loss: but when she saw his distress, she was sure that more than half of it was for her, and she did her very best to bear it well for his sake. And yet, when the blow fell, it was almost too much for her. She had all a woman's horror of doubt. Let her have anything to endure but doubt; yet doubt had come into her house, and, perhaps, for ever was to reign over her. She, however, took the misfortune very sweetly and bravely. In general, the woman bears the small misfortunes and continued disappointments of life best, and the man bears best the great ones. Here the case was reversed: the woman bore it best, but that was mainly because of the supreme comfort of her husband's love and sympathy.

If we consider women whose lot it is to inspire deep affection, we shall sometimes find them, not those who can most generously bestow, but those who can most graciously receive. All is offered ; they accept all without haggling about its possible endurance ; their trust in affection helps to make it lasting, and their own comfort in it is so evident as to call it forth and make it show itself at its best.

Donald Johnstone's wife had a disposition that longed to repose itself on another. Her peculiar and almost unconscious tact made her seem generally in harmony with her surroundings.

All she said and did, and wore, appeared to be a part of herself ; there was a sweet directness, a placid oneness about her, which inspired belief and caused contentment.

“ Why am I so calm, so satisfied, so well pleased with myself in this woman's presence ? ” men might have asked themselves ; but they seldom did, perhaps because her

loving, placid nature was seasoned in a very small degree with the love of admiration. She had a gracious insight into the feelings of others, and used it not to show off her own beauties, but to console them for defects in themselves.

Many people show us our deficiencies by the light of their own advantages, but Donald Johnstone's wife showed rather how insignificant those deficiencies must be since she who was so complete had never noticed them.

A sincere and admired woman, her firm and open preference for her own made her own for ever satisfied; yet she always gave others a notion that she felt she had reason to trust them, sense to acknowledge their fine qualities, and leisure to delight in them.

Reverent in mind, and, on the whole, submissive, she yet was in the somewhat unusual position of a wife who knows that her husband's religious life is more developed and more satisfying than her own.

Master Donald's foster-brother was now sent for to dine in the nursery again, and delighted the nurse and her subordinate by the way in which he made himself at home, tyrannizing over the little Donald, picking the grapes out of his fat little hand, and trotting off with them while he sat on the floor and helplessly gazed at his nurse.

“Run after the little boy, then, Master Donny,” cried the nursery-maid; “why, he ain't near so big as you are!” But the little Donald placidly smiled; either he had not pluck yet, or he had not sense for contention; and, in the meantime, the little Lancy took from him and collected for himself most of the toys, specially the animals from a Noah's ark, which he carried off in his frock, retiring into a corner to examine them at his leisure.

Mr. Johnstone came upstairs soon after the nursery-dinner, and said the little Lancey might come with him and see Mrs. Johnstone; so the child's pinafore was taken off, and, with

characteristic fearlessness, he put his hand in "gentleman's" hand and was taken down.

Mrs. Johnstone was in the dressing-room; her husband, having considered the matter, had decided to spare her all waiting for the child, all expectation. He opened the door quietly; she did not know this little guest was in the house; she should guess his name, or he should tell it her.

She had just sent the nurse down to her dinner, and was lying on a couch asleep—the baby in her bassinet beside her.

Fast asleep as it seemed; yet, the moment her husband came in with the child in his arms, she started as if the thought in his mind had power over her, and, opening her eyes, she looked at them with quiet, untroubled gaze. The time she had been waiting for was manifestly came. She rose, and slowly, as if drawn on, came to meet her husband, with her eyes on the little child, who was occupied with the toys which he still held in his hand. Neither the hus-

band nor the wife spoke ; she came close, laid her hand on the child's little bright head, and her cheek against his.

“ Lady did kiss Lancey,” said the child ; then, looking attentively at her, and perhaps approvingly, he pursed up his rosy mouth and proffered a kiss in his turn.

“ Lady must not cry,” he next said, almost with indifference ; then, as if to account for her tears, he continued, “ Lady dot a mummy gone in ship—gone all away.”

“ Does Lancey cry for his mummy ? ” she asked the child, who was still embraced between them.

He shook his head.

“ Why not ?—I feel easier, love, now I have seen him,” she murmured ; “ our children are not like him.—Why not, sweet baby-boy ? ” she repeated.

“ ’Cause boy dot a horse and two doggy.” He opened his hand and displayed this property. Nothing more likely than that this infantile account of himself was true.

The animals from the ark had driven all the mother he knew of clean out of his baby-heart.

“He talks remarkably well for two years and a quarter,” she said, and that was almost an assertion of her opinion, for the little Donald had only reached the age of two years, two months and a fortnight. Mr. Johnstone heard it almost with dismay; his own opinion was drifting in the other direction.

She dried her eyes and held out her arms. “Will Lancey come to lady?” Of course he would; she took him, and sat down with him in her lap on the couch.

“I know how this will end,” she exclaimed, holding him to her bosom with yearning unutterable. Then she burst into a passion of tears, kissing the little hands and face, and bemoaning herself and him with uncontrollable grief. “O Donald! how shall I bear it?”

She was bearing it much better than he

could have expected. He was almost overcome himself, thinking how cruelly she had been treated, but he had nothing to say. He could only be near, standing at the end of the couch, leaning over her, to feel with her, and for her.

Then the child spoke, putting his arms round her neck—"Lancey loves lady." He seemed to have some intention of comforting her in his little mind.

"Estelle!" remonstrated her husband.

"But I shall know," she exclaimed, "I shall know in the end. You are making all possible inquiry?"

"My bright, particular star!" was all he answered; the tone was full of pity.

"And is nothing found out, Donald, nothing?"

"It is early days yet. If anything more can be done, I am on the look-out to do it."

"And you find nothing to do at present?"

"No."

“I know how this will end,” she repeated.
“I never will love *my own* less; he is so dear to every fibre of my heart.”

“He is most dear to us both.”

“But this one has come so near to me already, and the nearness is such a bitter pain—such pain. (Oh, you poor little one!) I know it will end in my so loving him, from anxiety and doubt, that I shall not be able to bear him long out of my sight.”

“All shall be as you wish, my Stella,” said the husband; but he thought, “You are far happier than I, for it will end—I know it will—in your loving both the boys as if they were your own; whilst I feel already that, if the shadow of a doubt remains, I shall not deeply love either.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE time was a little past the middle of the century; the "Great Exhibition" had not long been over; the Metropolitan Railway had not yet begun to burrow under London, encouraging the builders to plant swarms of suburban villas far out into the fields; Londoners paid turnpikes then before they could drive out for fresh air, and they commonly contented themselves with a sojourn in the autumn at the sea-side, or in Scotland, instead of, as a rule, rushing over and dispersing themselves about the continent.

But Donald Johnstone decided to take his wife there that autumn, baby, nurse, and all. First he would establish the children at Dover; then he would propose to their mother that the little Lancey—"boy," as he more

frequently called himself—should be sent to them, and have also the benefit of the change; then he would take her away and reproduce for her their wedding tour.

This had been to Normandy and Brittany, where they had seen quaint, sweet fashions, even then on the wane; beautiful clothes, which those who have not already seen never will see; and peaked and pointed habitations, so strange and so picturesque, that nothing but a sojourn in them can make one believe them to be as convenient as those of ugly make.

Estelle should see again the apple-gathering, the great melons, and the purple grapes drawn into market with homely pomp; the brown-faced girls gossiping beside their beautiful roofed wells, dressed in garments such as no lady in the finest drawing-room puts on at present; creatures like country-fied queens, stepping after their solitary cows, each one with the spindle in her hand. He would take her to Coutances, and then

on to Avranches, and there he would unfold to her a certain plan.

She fretted much over the doubt, which at present no investigation availed to solve. Time had not befriended her: the more she thought, the more uncertain she became.

Yet he hoped that time might bring them enlightenment in the end. He would take her to Avranches, where lived his only sister, the widow of a general officer, who, from motives of economy, had settled there, and did not often come to England.

In his opinion she was one of the most sensible women to be met with anywhere—just the kind of creature to be trusted with a secret—a little too full of theories, perhaps, almost oppressively intelligent, active in mind and body, but a very fast friend, and fond of his wife.

He felt that, if the two boys could be parted from Estelle for three or four years, and be under the charge of his sister, it would be more easy, at the end of that time,

to decide which of them had really the best claim to be brought up with his name and with all the prospects of a son. It was quite probable that, in the course of three or four years, such a likeness might appear in one of the boys to some member of his family as would all but set the matter at rest.

Nothing could be done if they remained in London, brought up among his own friends, and known by name and person to every servant about him. But if he left them at Avranches with his sister, among French servants, who knew nothing about them—each known by his pet name, and not addressed by any surname—and if they themselves knew nothing about their parentage, there could be no injustice to either in the choice the parents might eventually make, even though they should decide not to take the child first sent home to them.

He was desirous, for his own sake as well as for theirs, that they should hear of no

doubt ; that would be cruelty to the one not chosen, causing him almost inevitable discontent and envy, while the one chosen might himself become the victim of doubt, and never be able to enjoy the love of his parents, or any other of his advantages in peace.

“ We must be their earthly providence,” he said to his wife, when he had unfolded this plan to her ; “ we must absolutely and irrevocably decide for them. We must try fully to make up our minds, and then, whichever we eventually take, we must treat altogether as a son.”

“ And the other, Donald ? ”

“ The other ? I think one’s best chance of peace in any doubtful matter is not to do the least we can, but the most ; we must give them both the same advantages in all respects, and so care for, and advance, and provide for, and love the other—so completely adopt him, that if we should ever have the misfortune to find that, after all, we have made a mistake, we may still feel that there

was but one thing more we could have given him, and that was our name."

"Then, even in that case, the choice having once been made, you would keep to it?"

"What do you think, my star?"

"It would be a cruel thing on the one we had taken for our own to dispossess him."

"Yes; but if we allowed things to stand, the loss and pain would all be our own; they would be nothing to the other. Some wrongs are done in spite of a great longing after the right, and such I hold to be irrevocable."

"I see no promise of rest in any plan. Perhaps my best chance will be to leave it altogether to you; you often talk of casting our cares upon God. I have tried, but it does not seem to relieve me of the burden. I can—I often do cast them upon you, only I hope—"

"What, Estelle?"

"I hope your sister will not say, as your

mother did when our little Irene died, that it was one of those troubles which was ordained to work for my good."

"She was only quoting Scripture."

"When she used to come and pray with me, and read with me, I felt at last able to submit; and I found, as she had said, that submission could take the worst sting of that anguish out of my heart. But no one must talk so to me now. I have not fallen into the hands of God, but into those of a wicked woman. This is different."

"Is it, my wife?"

"Your sister may say it is a rebuke to me for having loved this present life, and my husband, and my children too much, or she may say it is a warning to me that these blessings can—oh, how easily!—be withdrawn. I will try to bear it as a discipline, as a punishment; let her teach me, if she can, to submit; but I cannot bear to hear about blessings in disguise. My own little son; he was the pride of my heart; and now,

when I hold him in my arms, and see the other playing at my feet, I wonder which has the best right to me. I know that nothing can make up to me for the doubt. I shall never be so happy any more ! ”

So she thought ; but she was utterly devoid of morbid feelings, and quite willing to let time do all for her that it could. She had a sincere desire to be well and happy. A woman, with any insight into man's nature, generally knows better than to believe that, in the long-run, delicacy can be interesting, and low spirits and sorrow attractive.

She did not aggravate herself with anger against the nurse. She knew she was to part with both the boys for years, while a doubtful experiment was tried. Yet she let herself be refreshed by the sweet weather, the rural signs of peace and homely abundance ; and when she drove up to the quaint abode her sister-in-law had made a home of, she could be amused with its oddness ; the tiled floors, numerous clocks, clumsy furni-

ture, thick crockery ; the charming kitchen, full of bright pots and pans, so much lighter and more roomy than the drawing-room ; the laundry in the roof ; its orchard that stood it instead of a flower-garden, almost every tree hoary with lichen, and feathery with mistletoe ; its little fish-pond and fountain, with a pipe like a quill, and its wooden arbours, with all their great creaking weather-cocks.

And there was one little child, a girl, in the house—a small, dimpled thing, about six months younger than the two boys.

That first evening passed off, and both husband and wife shrank from entering on the subject of their thoughts. Mrs. O'Grady, Charlotte by Christian name, was full of talk and interest about all manner of things. She had the disadvantage of being very short-sighted, and so missed the flashing messages and expressive communications that passed between other eyes.

This defect makes many people more in-

tellectual than they otherwise would be, and less intelligent, throwing them more on thought and less on observation. But in her case it was only a question of wearing or not wearing her spectacles. When she had them on, "all the world was print to her;" when they were off, her remarks were frequently more sensible in themselves than suitable to the occasion.

Politics, church parties, family affairs, the newest books, the last scientific theories—nothing came amiss to her, every scrap of information was welcome.

Mrs. Johnstone looked on rather listlessly, and soon it was evident that her husband could not make an opening for the matter that was in their thoughts. He was letting himself be amused and interested while waiting for a more convenient season.

When they had retired, she said,—

"I shall be so much more easy, Donald, when you have managed to tell her our story."

“But what was I to do?” he answered. “I could not suddenly dash into her sentence with a ‘by-the-bye,’ as she does herself. ‘By-the-bye, Charlotte, we don’t know whether one of our children is, in fact, ours or not!’”

“That would at least astonish her into silence for a time.”

The next morning just the same difficulty! They were in the midst of a discussion before they knew that it had begun.

The baby was taken out after breakfast, by her nurse, into the apple orchard.

“You have no servants who speak English, have you, Charlotte?” asked Mr. Johnstone, thinking to open the matter.

“No,” she answered; “and I prefer the French as servants, on the whole, to the English. But I like that young Irish woman, Estelle, that you have brought with your baby. There is something sweet about her that one does not meet with here. Do you know, I have long noticed

that, of all modern people, the Irish suffer least, and the French most, from the misery of envy?"

"Do you think so?" said her brother, only half listening.

"Yes, and hence the Irish chivalry towards the women of 'the quality,' and the total absence of any such feeling in a Frenchman. He, frugal and accumulative, thinks, 'I am down because you are up.' The poor Frenchman would rather all were down than that any should have what he has not; but it is the material advantages of those well off that he envies them; but the poor Irishman, wasteful and not covetous, could not do without something to admire. One of these two takes in anguish through his eyes, whenever he casts them on beauty or riches not his; the other takes in consolation through his eyes. He is not wholly bereaved of grandeur or loveliness if he may look on them, and he troubles himself little that they are not his own."

“ When demagogues leave him alone ! ”
her brother put in.

“ It is singular, though,” she continued, gliding on with scarcely any pause, “ that though the Irish can do best without education and culture, they repay it least, they are least changed by it. Now the English, of all people, can least do without culture and education, and repay them most. What a brute and what a dolt a low Englishman frequently is ! but a low Irishman is often a wit, and full of fine feelings.”

“ Marry an Irishman,” said the brother, with a smile, “ and speak well of the Irish ever after.”

“ Of course ! I always used to say, ‘ Give me an Irish lover and a Scotch cousin.’ ”

“ Why an Irish lover ? ”

“ Because he is sure to marry me as soon as he can, just as a Scotch cousin, if he gets in anywhere, is sure to do his best to get me in too.”

“ You want nothing English, then ? ”

“Yes, certainly, give me an English housemaid. Let a French woman nurse me when I am ill, let an English woman clean me my house, and an Englishman write me my poetry! For it is a curious thing,” she went on, “that sentiment and poetic power never go together. The French are rich in sentiment and very poor in poets. How rich in sentiment the Irish are, and how poor the English! We call the Irish talk poetical, yet Ireland has never produced a poet even as high as the second order. How far more than the lion’s share England has of all the poetry written in the English tongue—or, if you speak of current poetry, you might add, ‘and in all other tongues.’” Here she chanced to put on her spectacles, and immediately came to a full-stop.

“Well?” said her brother; but she was no more to be lured on, when she could see, than stopped when she could not. His chance had come.

“If you will put on your bonnet, Charlotte,”

he said, "we will go out about the place. I have something important—to us—to say to you."

She rose instantly with the strange sense of defect and discomfiture that she often felt when her spectacles showed her other people's eyes, and thus that she had been at fault because her own were not better.

It was a difficult story to tell, and at first she could not be made to believe that all had been done which could be done.

An unsolvable doubt seemed just as unbearable to her as it had done to the mother. She sat down on a bench in the apple orchard with nothing to say and nothing to propose.

"I do not believe this thing ever was done," she said hesitatingly at last. "I think the nurse's baseness began and ended when she planted this horrid doubt in your hearts. She foresaw that it would rid her of her own child. What could you do but take him?"

“But you have told me this,” she presently said, “because you think I can help you?”

“Yes, you can help us—what we want is to gain time.”

He then unfolded his plan. Each of the little fellows called himself by a pet name. One went in the nursery by the name of “Middy,” so called after a favourite sailor-doll they had; the other generally called himself “Boy.”

If they could be taken charge of till they were five or six years old, and the parents denied themselves all intercourse with them during those years, it was not in nature that the one truly theirs should not show some strong likeness either to one of his parents or to some of his brothers and sisters—for there might well be both by that time—or a likeness as to voice or even disposition might show itself; and, failing that, there was the other child. He might begin to betray his parentage; the Johnstones had no like-

ness of Aird, but could never forget his wife.

An irrevocable choice must be made at the end of that time ; and when the father and mother came over to make it, neither child would have heard anything about his story. The one selected would soon return their love and subside into his place with the unquestioning composure of childhood, and the other would be equally contented with his position, having long forgotten all about his native country and his earliest friends.

Little more than a week after this, Mr. Johnstone was sitting on the sands of a small French bathing-place, his sister with him. He had brought over the two tiny boys, and they were playing at their feet, while Mrs. O'Grady scanned them eagerly.

"Yours—I mean the one you call 'Middy' —is the most like our family, and like you in particular," she observed.

"Yes, we think so."

"And he is the one whom you brought

up till the nurse herself put it into your heads that he might not be yours ? ”

“ Even so.”

“ The other has slightly darker eyelashes and browner hair than either yours or Estelle’s.”

“ Of course we have noticed that.”

“ And yet you doubt ? ”

“ We fancy that ‘ Boy ’ is a little like our dear child Irene.”

“ Estelle says she wants me to dress them precisely alike, and treat them absolutely alike.”

“ Yes, we have decided on that. We shall leave photographs behind us. When they see these in your book, they can be told to call them father and mother. And we shall never take these names from either, but only teach one of them to understand that he is an adopted child.”

The parting with the boys was very bitter to Mrs. Johnstone. She held each to her heart with yearnings unutterable, though, as

was but natural, only one fretted after her at all, and that for a very little while.

And when they were brought into the quaint house near Avranches, it was doubtful whether either had the intelligence to be surprised. One was perfectly fearless, and found out directly that the “ ‘tupid mans and womans could not talk to ‘ Boy ;’ ” the other listened to the babble about him with infantile scorn, and sometimes, baby as he was, showed himself a true-born Briton by laughing at it.

But that stage of their life was soon over ; their French nurse made them understand her very shortly ; and before they had discovered that little Charlotte’s English was worse than their French, she was taken away—gone to Ireland to her grandmother, as they were told. They thought this was a pity ; her mother, with a touch of bitterness, thought so too ; but the grandmother had long urged it, promising to provide for the little Charlotte, and but that the Johnstones

had known of her intended absence, they would not have proposed their plan.

The poor must do—not what they would, but—what they can.

Even if her little Charlotte was left unprovided for at the grandmother's death, the mother felt that here was a chance of saving several hundred pounds for her. Donald Johnstone's payment was to be liberal in proportion to the importance of the interest at stake. And, in the meantime, the little Charlotte cost her mother nothing, and the two boys were just as happy together when she was gone.

They had not been a year in France before they spoke French as well as French children, which is not saying much. In less than another year they spoke their English with a French accent, loved their nurse more than any living creature, excepting one another, and had altogether lost the air of English children, for their clothes were worn out, and they wore instead the frilled aprons

and baggy trousers of the country ; their hair was cropped perfectly short, as is there the mode, and every article they had about them was equally tasteless and unbecoming.

But their toys were charming.

Their aunt, as they both called her, was careful to awaken in their infant minds a certain enthusiasm for England ; they had many pictures of English scenes in their nursery. The nurse also did her part ; she frequently talked to them about the dear papa and mamma, caused them to kiss the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Johnstone every night before they went to bed, and instilled into them something of the peculiar French tenderness and sentiment towards a mother.

They both loved this pretty mother, and they grew on in health and peace till they were nearly five years old, about which time it became evident that the Johnstones could not make up their minds to be absent much longer.

Mrs. O'Grady had not, for some time past,

found it possible to doubt which was her brother's child, but she loyally forbore to make the least difference in her treatment of them, or to convey any hint to her brother.

And now the children were told that dear father and mother were coming, and this important news was a good deal connected in their minds with the growth of their own hair. It was much too long now, their nurse said, but English boys wore it so. They thought it would have been impossible for father and mother to come and see them while it had been cropped so short. Their aunt also had sent to London for complete suits of children's dress for them. Their nurse was very gracious as regarded these. Melanie, the cook, came up to see them dressed *à l'Anglais* ; she agreed with her that there was much to be said in favour of the English style. Certainly, but for these clothes, the dear father and mother would never have taken the trouble to come ; it was to be hoped they would like them.

How slight was the feeling of the children as to this expected interview ! how intense were the feelings of the parents !

A door opened, and a pretty little boy, who knew nothing of their arrival, came dancing into a room where were seated a lady and a gentleman close together.

In an instant he knew them, and stood blushing. Then that lady said,—

“ Come on, sweet boy ! ” and he advanced and kissed her hand, and that gentleman looked at him—oh, so earnestly !

This was the dear mother ; she had tears in her eyes, and she took him on her knee, and kissed his little face and head, and stroked his hair. So did the dear father.

“ Did he know them ? ”

“ Oh, yes, and he and Middy had wanted them to come for a long while. The dear mother was quite as pretty as he had expected,” he continued looking up at her. He spoke in French, and paid her a little French compliment as naturally as possible. Then he

blushed again with pleasure as she caressed him, and was glad he had all his best things on.

After a time, his aunt came in, and quietly took him out of the room.

“I should not have known him, he is so much grown and altered,” sighed Mrs. Johnstone; “but he has made it evident that it is Middy whom we have not seen.”

“This is a most lovable, pretty little fellow,” said the husband.

“And not at all unlike our little Irene,” she answered.

But, in a minute or two, another child, equally unconscious of what awaited him, opened the same door, and marched boldly in. A sudden thrill shook the hearts of both. The child paused, drew back, and trembled; then he put up his arm before his face, and burst into tears.

What it was that he felt or feared, it would have been quite past his power to express; but the dear mamma was there; she had tears in her eyes; was she going to kiss

him ? He did not know what to say ; what should he do ?

He could not look, he was crying so ; and somebody carried him to her, and put his arms round her neck, and called him his dear little son.

“ Mamma, I never meant to cry,” he presently said, with all naïveté—and mother was crying too, and so was father—well ! it was very extraordinary, when he thought he should have been so glad. And presently he *was* very glad because they were so kind.

They said they had wanted him so much for such a long time, and he should go to England—go home and see his dear little sisters. They said he was just like the others, and there was a baby brother at home ; he must teach him to play. So Middy was very happy indeed, as in a child’s paradise he nestled close to the long-lost mother, and admired his father, and thought how nice it would be to go to England with them.

It would have been hard to doubt any more ; the little flaxen-haired fellow was so like the children at home ; they were so vastly more drawn to him than to the other, and yet he too was greatly altered. He was not such a fine child for his years as when they had left him. But if they could have doubted, his own love and agitation would have settled all. The shy and yet delighted gaze, his contentment in their arms, the manner in which he seemed to have thought of them,—all helped them to a thankful certainty. The mother had not been without her sorrows. Since the parting she had lost two more little girls in infancy, and had longed inexpressibly to have her boy back again.

Charlotte came in at last ; she still had him in her arms. There was no mistaking the father's look of contentment. Charlotte had her spectacles on, and saw the state of the case at once.

“Of course,” she exclaimed ; “how could it be otherwise ? I am afraid, Middy, father

and mother will be rather shocked when I tell them that you have forgotten your other name."

"I thought I was Middy," answered the child.

Of course he did ! Great pains had been taken to prevent his thinking anything else.

"But that is a baby-name, my sweet boy ! Don't you know what your father's name is ? "

"Yes, Donald."

"Well, then, you are Donald too."

CHAPTER VIII.

“ I NEVER had any doubt which of the children was yours,” observed Mrs. O’Grady the next day.

“ It was the more good of you to say nothing, then,” replied the mother.

“ But now I hope you really feel at peace?”

“ Yes, at peace ; but, in order to do so, I must adopt your theory, and believe that Maria Aird or her second husband invented the story of the changing of the children,—that supposes baseness enough—but how far easier to do than to effect a real change ! ”

“ And you, Donald ? ” asked his sister.

“ My dear, I suppose myself to be quite satisfied which is my child ; but I am not satisfied to leave the other out of my care and influence for an hour.”

“It is certainly time Donald was taken home,” observed his sister; “he is a complete little Frenchman. And you would not like to leave Lancy, then, in my charge a little longer?”

“If I had no other reason I should still think it his right to be brought up as an Englishman also.”

“Then he must not breathe this air and eat this diet much longer. Race has not half so much to do with national character as people think! Why, some of the English families brought up here by English parents talk like the French, and cannot produce the peculiarly soft sound of the English ‘r,’ they either ring it or slur it over.”

“Companionship, my dear, nothing more.”

“But Charlotte would not deny herself the society of her one child, unless she felt what she has been saying very strongly,” said Mrs. Johnstone.

Donald Johnstone looked at his wife.

Tall, placid, fair, she was at work on a piece of knitting, and took her time about it. All her movements spoke of tranquillity, and she observed what was going on about her. Then he looked at his sister, who was netting. Even the movements of her small ivory shuttle had an energetic jerk which seemed to suit the somewhat eager flash and sparkle of her clear hazel eyes ; her thoughts were swift, her words were urgent for release, she longed to spread her theories, and scarcely noticed how they were received if she could but produce them.

“ No, Estelle, companionship is not all ; your boys have hardly any companions, English or French, but they do not play half so boisterously, and they are not half so full of mischief as they would be if they had been brought up in equal seclusion on English soil. The French child is more tame in early childhood than the English. It is France that does this, not his race.”

“ You really think so ? ”

“Of course I do ; the world is full of facts that bear on this point. In many parts of Germany, the men have a most unfair advantage over the women. They are better made, taller in proportion ; they are far more intellectual, and you must admit, Donald, that they are handsomer. All this mainly results from the superior diet of the men, specially in the towns. Many of them regularly dine out excellently well, leaving their women-folk at home to cabbage-soup and cheap sausages.”

“Mean hounds !” exclaimed Donald Johnstone, laughing.

“Yes, but unless the climate of Germany had already caused an inferiority in the women, they would not allow themselves to be so ‘put upon.’ It is the intense cold of their winter, together with poor diet, which dwarfs and deteriorates the women ; the same cold, with good food, braces the men. There is no nation in Europe where the height, strength, and wits of the sexes

are so equal as in France. In fact, I think the French woman has the best of it! It is partly the excellent climate—not hot enough to enervate, not damp to induce them to drink—and partly it is the excellent food. Soil influences air—air influences food: these together influence manners, and are more, on the whole, than descent.”

“I shall always feel, Charlotte, that you have a right to preach to us, and to put forth as many theories as you please,” said Donald Johnstone, when at last she came to a pause.

“Because you feel that there is a great deal in what I say?” she inquired.

Then she put on her spectacles, and caught a smile, half amused, half tender, flitting over her sister-in-law’s face. Her brother was openly laughing at her.

“Not at all,” he replied, “but because you are, as you always have been, the best of sisters and the most staunch of friends. You can understand people; you are willing, and

able too, to help them in their own way." Then, observing that she was a little touchy and not at all pleased, he quietly stepped out over the low window, and left her to his wife, for he knew that it would be difficult for him to set matters straight again.

The two little fellows were very docile children, and less independent than English boys of their age.

"Donald," as Mrs. O'Grady was now careful to call him, "Donald has fewest faults, but he is the least interesting. Lancy is a very endearing child."

"Has he any special fault?" asked Mrs. Johnstone.

"Well," she answered, "I hardly know what to say about that."

Mrs. Johnstone looked up a little surprised; her sister-in-law appeared to speak with a certain caution. "He is a very endearing little fellow," she repeated.

"But if he has any special childish fault, I ought to know it, Charlotte."

“ Yes, my dear. Well, I must be very careful not to make a mountain of a mole-hill, and you must try, if I tell you what has occurred, not to think too much of it. He was but a baby, Estelle, when he first did it.”

“ Did what, Charlotte ? ”

“ But I have taken great pains not to make light of it, and also, I could not let you know, because it is a fault so rare in our rank of life, that it would have appeared to be a telling piece of evidence against him in your mind. It would have diminished his chance.”

Estelle coloured with anxiety.

“ The fact is, he has several times taken little articles that were not his own, and appropriated them. They were things of no great value. Can this be hereditary ? Were the father and mother honest ? ”

“ I cannot tell. But what a fault, Charlotte ! Does little Donald know ? ”

“ Yes, but you need not be afraid for him. Lancey was scarcely more than three years

old when, walking home from the town one day with his *bonne*, a minute toy was found in his hand that he could give no account of. They had been into several shops, but I never supposed that he had taken it. I thought some child must have dropped it, and that he had picked it up on the road. But, a few weeks after, I was in the market, bargaining for some oranges. I saw Lancey, who was with me, looking red and roguish, and was very much vexed when I found that he had snatched up an orange, and evidently meant to carry it off. The woman, with nods and winks, pointed this out to me; she evidently regarded it as a joke. I told her how wrong she was to laugh at him, made him give it back, and for several days, in order to impress his fault on his little mind, I deprived him of his usual dessert, though the oranges were always on the table."

"This was two years ago?"

"Yes."

"Then I am afraid it is not all."

“It was nearly all that I know of till last Christmas, when Donald sent over a box with some English school-books, and a number of little presents for the boys ; among these were two silver medals. Middy lost his almost at once, and there were great searchings for it. Lancey helped to look, but it could not be found ; then, one night after they were both asleep, *la bonne* was turning out the pockets of their little coats for the wash, and the two medals rolled out of Lancey’s coat. One had been tucked into the lining. Poor little fellow ! when I took him alone into my room the next morning, and showed them to him without saying a word, he wept piteously. And, Estelle, I believe he is cured. It was very touching to see the distress of both the little fellows when I made Lancy give back the medal and confess to Donald that he had taken it. Donald is much the most affectionate of the two, and when Lancey saw how much he was shocked and how sorry he was for him, he seemed to think all the more of

his fault himself. I did all I could to deepen the impression, to show them the sin of stealing, and the punishment too. For several days they were both very *triste*. Then Lancey said to me, ‘*When Middy says his prayers to-night, he’s going to ask God to forgive me.*’ I could do no less than say I was sure God would forgive him. But I have not let the matter drop; and you must be on the watch, Estelle, to help the poor little fellow against himself.” And so, with all tenderness, the childish fault was told, everything that watchful love could do being extended to Lancy afterwards, and to all appearance he was cured, and as a rule, was a better boy than his foster-brother.

The two little Frenchmen were brought back to their native isle. At first, they took it amiss that there was no soup at the nursery breakfast, but then the nurse never expected to have hold of their hands when they walked out. And the dogs did not understand them; they thought this must

be on purpose ; but, on the other hand, they were allowed—indeed, they were encouraged—to climb the trees, and the *cher père* had given them some spades and a wheelbarrow. There were no drums, swords, and shrill French pipes to parade the garden with, but these spades were better than nothing. The *cher père* said they might dig as deep as they liked with them.

“ But the clay would stain their new coats.”

“ Oh, that could not be helped ! ”

“ Might they dig down to the middle of the world, then ? ”

“ Certainly, if they could.”

They began to think England was a nice place to live in, and after a short sojourn in it contrived to make as much noise, and do as much mischief as any other two little urchins breathing, for they were in the country now. The *cher père* had a rambling, homely old house in the country, and there they gradually mastered English, learning it from the little sisters, though they continued,

to the great scandal of the servants, to jabber French, and *tutoyer* one another when they were together.

Childhood is long to the child, and his growth is slow, though to his parents he appears to "shoot up."

Donald and Lancey shot up, and neither of them showing the slightest taste for any branch of learning whatever, they gave their governess a great deal of trouble.

The nurse said there never were two such young Turks. That was partly because, being of the same age and size, whatever piece of mischief attracted one, the other was always ready to help him in. Then the little girls were always trying to imitate them. It made them so rude "as never was." As to the nursery children, specially Master Freddy, who would have been as good as gold but for them, they took delight in leading him astray, and had taught him to speak French too, on purpose that she might not understand what they said to him.

Master Freddy kept his seventh birthday without having had any broken bones to rue, which was wonderful considering the diligence with which he had studied the manners and actions of his two brothers, as they were always called. But, about this time, they were sent off rather suddenly to school, it being at last allowed by governess, nurse, and even mother, that they were past feminine management.

Mrs. Johnstone was excessively fond of them both.

None of the anguish of doubt remained. Her boy was her own, and he was intensely fond of her; yet towards Lancey she felt a never-satisfied yearning. She was rather more indulgent to him than to Donald, as if she could never forget her period of uncertainty; and if there was a soft place in Lancey's heart—which is doubtful, for little boys are often hard-hearted mortals—it was probably reserved for her. It was certainly to her that he always complained when he

had any grievance against the nurse, and in her arms that he cried when the governess punished him for any grave delinquency by making him stop in doors on a half-holiday.

Lancey remembered long after he went to school (that is to say for nearly six weeks) how dear mother had talked to him when he was in his little bed the night before he went. She kissed him a great many times, and she cried, and he promised he would be so good, and never make her unhappy by doing naughty things. And then she talked to Donald. And Donald declared that he was never going to get into any mischief any more ; he would promise her that he never would, and he would always say his prayers ; and he would never fight with the other boys—at least he wouldn't if he could help it ; and certainly he would never tell a lie whether he could help it or not.

The house in Upper Harley Street was a far more comfortable abode when they were gone, and they saw very little of it for

several years to come, their holidays always taking place when the family was in the country.

As to their entrance on school life it was much like that of other little boys. It was rather a large preparatory school to which Mr. Johnstone took his son and his adopted son, both the little fellows chubby, brave, according to their years, truthful, and idle. They had a box of cakes and other *prog* with them. He knew better than they did what would become of it. They had also plenty of money. He did not, of course, expect that they could have much to do with the spending of it, but he found out two of the bigger boys, whose fathers he was acquainted with, gave each a handsome tip, turned his fledgelings over to them, and left them, feeling the parting, on the whole, more than they did.

Under the auspices of these their new friends, the two little boys, when their own *prog* had been consumed, were privileged to

put their money into a common purse, which happened just then to be nearly empty ; a great deal more prog, some of it very unwholesome, was then bought and consumed, after which the school sat in judgment on the new boys, kicked some of their caps round the playground, and ordered them never to wear them any more ; tore up some of their books as being only fit for the nursery, and then decided that such a name as *Donald Johnstone* was not to be borne. There had been another boy whose name was so spelt, but he called it Johnson, why couldn't this fellow do the same. Yes, it was a troublesome name to pronounce—not really long, of course—but it sounded long. It was an uppish name ; they were sure he was proud of it. Half of it was quite enough for any fellow ; from henceforth he should be called Don John.

Don John accepted the verdict, and took it in good part. His father had impressed on both the boys that they must never be

“cheeky,” or it would be the worse for them. He thought when they next decreed that Lancey should be called Sir Lancelot, that they were rather inconsistent, but he did not take the liberty to say so, and the two little fellows made their way pretty well on the whole, seldom getting into trouble, except by a too ardent championship of one another. To learn how to disguise this, their only deep affection, was their first lesson in duplicity.

Always to take one another's part, right or wrong, when they dared, was their natural instinct; their fealty and devotion was far stronger than that felt by most true brothers, they were never known to quarrel. They were always side by side in their class, because Lancey would not learn as fast as he might have done, lest he should outstrip Don John, and get into a higher form; and they were always together in their play, because Don John did not care to outdo Lancey, and have to be with stronger boys instead of with him.

But the longing for companionship, a certain *camaraderie* as they would have called it, was not Don John's only reason for keeping close to Lancey. For a long while the childish fault had been almost forgotten ; if ever alluded to, it was by Lancey himself ; but when the boys were twelve years old, and had just returned to school after the Easter holidays, Don John showed symptoms of illness, and was seized upon and sent home again forthwith.

He had the measles, and was away for nearly six weeks. There never was much the matter with him, and he returned ; but in a day or two a very slight something, he hardly knew what it was, seemed to let him know that Lancey was watched, and that he knew it.

Lancey did not meet his eye ; that alone was strange.

An opinion seemed to be floating in the air that it was better not to leave things about. It was hardly expressed, but it was

acted on, and the first hint he saw of such action drove the blood to Don John's heart ; he remembered the medal.

The next day the two boys were alone together in a class-room for one minute. Don John looked at Lancey, and putting his head down on the high desk, whispered with a long sigh that was almost a sob,—

“ They don't *know* anything against you, do they, Lancey ? ”

“ No,” answered the other little fellow in a frightened whisper, and feigning to be busy with his dictionary. “ Don't seem to be talking to me. They only suspect.”

Lancey's guilt was thus taken for granted, and confessed at once.

A boy, dashing into the class-room, called them out to cricket.

“ Where are *the things*, then ? ” sobbed Don John again. “ Can't they be found ? ”

“ I've buried them,” replied Lancey, and they darted out together, pretending to be eager for the game.

As the two passing one another were for an instant apart from the rest, Don John cried out,—

“Where?”

“You can’t get them out,” replied Lancey, as after an interval they passed each other again. “I buried them in the garden, and you know the door is almost always locked.”

“Say whereabouts it was,” answered Don John? But the two did not meet any more till the game was over.

“What do you want to get them out for?” asked Lancey, as crest-fallen and sad they left the cricket-field together.

“Because I know one of them is Marsden’s watch. You always said last half that it was a far better watch than either of ours. He never will rest till he gets it, or till they find you out.”

He spoke in French, using the familiar “tu.” He was not angry with him, and the other was less ashamed than afraid.

“He only suspects,” repeated Lancey, sick at heart, and already feeling the truth of those words. “The wages of sin are hard.”

“And I took some money too—Oh, Don, how could I do it?”

“You might have known I should have plenty when I came back. Why couldn’t you wait?”

“I don’t know. I took two sovereigns, one was an Australian sovereign. He left them on his locker, and when he was telling the boys that it was gone, he said he knew that was not a safe place to have put it on, and he looked at me.

“Then we must get back that very sovereign,” said Don John; “one of mine will not do.”

Lancey said no, they only suspected him, and now he knew the misery that came of taking things he should never do it any more. He then explained exactly where he had buried the watch and the two sovereigns. On the head-master’s birthday they

always had a holiday, and were allowed to range all over the place. While he was walking about in the garden on that day, miserable on account of what Marsden had just said, he found that the other boys had fallen back from him, and then dispersed themselves ; he was quite alone. He hastily pushed a hole in some loose earth, close to a melon-frame, by which he was standing, dropped in the watch and the money, and with his foot covered them just as some boys drew near. It was five days since this had occurred, and the first shower would probably uncover this property again. In the evening of that very day Don John had come back with lots of prog, lots of money. "And then," said Lancey, "I wished I hadn't done it."

Don John burst out with,—

"If you were found out, you would be—" he stopped awe-struck.

"I know," said Lancey, "and father

would be sent for—O what shall I do—and mother would know too.”

“It was wicked,” answered Don John
“I won’t go to sleep all night thinking what we can do. It was wicked; *it was worse than being a cad.*”

Yes, Lancey felt that it was worse than being a cad. Human language could go no further; they had both, as it were, made their confession, and their minds for the moment were a little relieved.

CHAPTER IX.

THE morning after this conversation two remarkable things occurred.

There were four other boys in the dormitory where Don John slept ; these were Lancey, Marsden, and two younger fellows.

When they began to get up, Don John complained that his left arm hurt him horribly. It was very much swollen, and he could not dress himself.

The weather was hot, the boys had been out rather late the previous evening in the playing-field. Don John was a great climber, he confessed to having had a fall ; he must have sprained it then, Marsden said. He seemed to have no opinion to give on the matter.

His room-mates gave him a good deal of

awkward help, which hurt him very much ; but when they found that his jacket could not be put on, they went and fetched their Dame, and she took him away.

Don John asked if Lancey might come too.

“ Oh, not by no means ; he was better by half by himself.”

So she bore him off to a little study set apart for such contingencies as hurts and accidents which were distinct from illness, and there she much consoled him for his pain by giving him a little pot of hot tea all to himself, two eggs, and a plate of buttered toast. He felt much better after this, but he wanted Lancey.

Presently the head-master came in, and with him a surgeon.

“ How had he managed to hurt himself so much ? ”

“ He had been climbing a tree, and he could not get down, so he sprang from the end of a bough, and fell on his arm.”

“Then it did not hurt him much at first?”

“No, it felt quite numb.”

Neither asked when this had taken place; that it had been just before going to bed the night before was taken for granted.

Yet the surgeon did testify a little surprise.

“It’s extraordinary what boys will sleep through,” he remarked.

“You should have mentioned it last night; my boy,” said the master kindly. “Why didn’t you?”

Don John said nothing, but he turned pale.

“It gives you a good deal of pain, doesn’t it?” he proceeded.

“It didn’t, sir, until I began to talk about it,” answered the boy.

In fact he could not bear the pain and the fear of detection together; he began to tremble visibly.

But he had much worse pain to bear

before the surgeon had done with him, for it was found that his wrist was badly sprained, and that the small bone of the upper arm was broken.

Soon after this the other remarkable thing occurred.

At twelve o'clock, when the boys came out of school, their Dame asked to see Marsden.

"Master Marsden, you're mighty careless of your things," she exclaimed, when he and some of the other boys came running up. "I was just a having your dormitory cleaned out, and when we moved the box atop of your locker, look here—if there wasn't your watch and the two sovereigns behind it that you've been making a work about."

Marsden took these things and blushed as he had never blushed in his life before; what to do he did not know; but Lancey just then passing by and looking as usual crestfallen and miserable, he obeyed a good impulse,—

"I say, Sir Lancelot," he exclaimed,

“look here, I must be an uncommon stupid ass !”

Lancey looked with all his might, there was the Australian sovereign, and there was the watch and the other sovereign.

“They were found at the back of my box !” proceeded Marsden. “I could have declared I had looked there, but it seems I didn’t.”

A friendly boy at that instant stepped up, and stared him full in the face.

“Hold your tongue,” he whispered, “we were mistaken; don’t *let out* that we suspected him.”

“They were found at the back of my box,” repeated Marsden.

“Oh, were they,” said Lancey, “well I’m glad you’ve got them again,” moderate and quiet words, but his gratitude was deep; he was reprieved.

“Of course it’s nothing to you,” said the blundering Marsden, “but I thought you’d like to know.”

Several other boys in an equally blundering spirit betrayed their former suspicions by making like speeches, and showing a sudden desire to play with Lancey.

Nobody but Don John, he was sure, could have done this—but how ?

This was how ; but Lancey did not know it till some time afterwards.

The boys went to bed as usual, and the others—even poor Lancey—soon fell asleep. Don John then began to carry out the hardest part of his projected task ; this was to keep himself awake till the dead time of the night, for he well knew that if he once went to sleep he should not wake till he was called in the morning.

He sat upright in his little bed and cogitated. There were three ways of getting into the garden ; and once in there were several ways out, but they were all difficult.

It was well-known that to get in otherwise than by the door, you must go through the kitchen, which involved a long tramp down

dark passages, and a great risk of making a noise. Or if you did not go that way you must descend the principal staircase (which had a nasty trick of creaking), and go past the head-master's own bedroom door; or, finally, you might creep along the corridor and descend by the washhouse roof. This, in hot weather, when the corridor window was wide open, was by far the shortest and easiest way, but then, unless the garden-door, which was always locked inside had the key in it, how should he get out and get back again? He could not come through the kitchen, the bar would be up; and that he could only remove on the other side. He could jump down from the washhouse roof, but he could not get up to it again without a short ladder, which would betray him. Even if he could surmount that difficulty it was doubtful whether he should not make more clatter in creeping up the tiles than in creeping down.

Therefore, if the garden door was locked, he would have to climb to the top of the

high garden wall, by the branches of the trained fruit-trees upon it, and creep along the top of the wall till he reached a certain tree whose branches hung out over it, from one of these he must spring, or drop himself down as well as he could. He would then be in the playground. To break a pane of glass, and so undo the fastening of a window, push up the sash, get in, shut it down again, and softly come upstairs to his little chamber ; all these things had to be done successfully, if Lancey was to be saved.

And if he himself was found out, what would happen ?

“ Why, if he had the watch and the two sovereigns upon him, it would appear that he was the thief, and, moreover, that he had committed the high misdemeanour of getting out at night, perhaps to perpetrate more thefts. Certainly for no possible good purpose. Perhaps it would end in his being expelled ; and mother—” Here Don John choked a little.

“But then if he did not do it, Lancey in the end was sure to be found out, then *he* would be expelled. And father—” Here he choked again. “Well it’s no use *funking* or *arguing*,” said Don John to himself, “because you know it’s going to be done, and you’re going to do it.”

It was almost like a nightmare when he thought of it afterwards, but he certainly enjoyed the deed while it was adoin^g.

To slip out of bed, listen all breathless, and watch his room-mates, while the clock in the corridor, the wheezing old clock, swung its clumsy pendulum, this was the only difficult thing he really had to do. It was the beginning; his own assurance to himself that the daring thing was to be attempted.

But a stealthy exultation in the strangeness of the adventure was damped by that obtrusive tick. The old clock was disagreeably wide awake; it seemed quite vicious enough to run down just at the decisive moment, and wake the second master, who might—who

naturally would think a boy must be at that moment climbing down by the washhouse roof into the garden.

It seemed equally natural that he should look out, and catch the boy.

No, that clock must be stopped at all risks. He stole out of the open door and along the bare corridor, full of dim moonlight and confused sounds of snoring.

A childish figure in a long white night gown ; he stopped before the clock, and gently opening its door, seized the great pendulum in his hand, and with one long gasping click the clock stopped. Then was his real danger ; the cessation of a noise so often wakes people, yet nobody did wake, not even the master.

What a wicked boy he was ! he felt as if he had choked off the incorruptible witness. He held the pendulum squeezed hard in his hand for two or three minutes, then stole back to his room and put on his clothes.

Often in his dreams it all came back to

him afterwards ; how he had tied his slippers together, and slung them round his neck, and how, as he got out, there was a white cat on the washhouse roof. In the dim light, her eyes gleamed on him strangely. He all but slipped—yet no—he reached the eave, and jumped down safely into the soft mould underneath. Then he stooped and put on his slippers, and effaced the marks of his feet in the mould.

The cat had jumped down after him, and was looking on. Here he was in the garden at one o'clock in the morning, and the moon was fast going down.

How beautiful those tall white lilies were. They enjoyed themselves in secret all through the night, gave out their scent, drank in the dew, and never let men and women find out that the night-time was their life and their day. The great evening primroses, too, white and yellow, were in their glory, and it seemed as if they also were keeping it secret, and still. The cat was very jealous of his being

out to see it all. It would be very unlucky for cats if people in a body should discover how much more jolly it was to be out in the warm golden mist of moonlight, when all was so fresh and sweet, than tucked up in their heated bedrooms under the low ceiling that shut out the stars.

Don John shared in the still stealthy delight of the flowers ; he knew all was easy till he had to get into the house again, and he put off thinking about that till the last moment. But the moon was fast southing ; it behoved him to be quick, unless he meant to stay out till day dawned. So with a beating heart he went softly across the dewy lawn among the wet flowers, the cat following him every step of the way, and looking on, while he secured the plunder, while he effaced the traces of his search, while he climbed the wall by means of the spread-out branches of a fig-tree, and while he softly crept along the top.

Oh, to be a cat for two minutes then ; for

cats never slip, and cats can see even under the branches in the dimness of a summer night!

Don John sprang into the tree successfully, but whether he mistook a branch for a shadow, or whether the white cat, springing after, startled him, he never knew, but the next instant he was on the grass at the foot of this tree, and his arm was under him.

He was on the right side of the wall, in the playground, that was his first thought.

He felt as if he had no arm, it was so perfectly numb. He was very cold, but presently thinking of himself, far more as a sneak than a hero, he got up and crept slowly towards the house.

“I’m glad I’m not obliged to be a burglar, too,” he said to himself, as he drew near, for a window was partly open, and he could get in without breaking a pane.

He had got the watch and the two sovereigns, but now the deed was done there seemed to be no glory in it, that was perhaps

because he had hurt himself. He stole up to his little bed, thinking what a bad boy he had been to have thought the first part of the adventure such rare fun. But now neither he nor Lancey would be expelled, that was something. It was as much as they could expect, and they must make the best of it.

It always seemed to him afterwards as if the cat understood the whole matter better than Lancey did. Have cats a natural sympathy with wickedness? probably they have, for the cat was the fast friend of Don John from that day forward; and when his "dame" came in would march in after her, gravely inspect his sling, and smell at his nice savoury dinner.

And Lancey? Why, Lancey at first was very much relieved, and also very sorry that Don John was hurt, but both the boys felt,—one as much as the other, that to have a broken arm, was as nothing compared with being expelled, and it did not signify to

either, which had the broken arm so much as it should have done. Father and mother now would never know. What real gratitude Lancey felt was mainly on that account. Don John loved them far more keenly than Lancey did, and this was but natural, but Lancey loved no one better. They were his all, and Don John's brothers and sisters and home were his too. The boys never set themselves one above the other, everything about them appeared to point plainly to their being equals, and little as Lancey had been told about his parentage, it satisfied him, and he asked no questions.

He had always known that he was a dear adopted son, that his father's name was the same as his own, that he had died before his child's birth, and that his mother had married again and gone to Australia.

It was Don John who asked awkward questions, Lancey did not care ; what did it signify who gave him all he wanted so long as it was given ? No such thought had

shaped itself distinctly in his young mind, thought was lying dormant as yet, and the love that cherished him and the well-being in which he lived kept it from expansion.

Once Don John asked his mother why Lancey's mother never wrote to him, and she answered that mothers did not all love their children as much as she did. The boy looked up at her with clear blue eyes full of surprise. It had seemed as natural that a mother should love as that a flame should burn.

His arm was just well when she said this unexpected thing. She had a very long string of amber beads round her neck; he loved to rub the larger ones against the sleeve of his jacket, and make little bits of paper stick to them. He always remembered afterwards how she looked down upon him as he sat by her, when he asked what was the use to any fellow of having a mother if she did not love him, and she moved his thick flaxen hair from his forehead while he made

another little bit of paper leap to the beads, and then he put his arm round her waist and leaned his head against her shoulder to cogitate. She was never in a hurry, this sweet comfortable mother. She always had time to listen to every grievance about hard lessons, and childish scrapes. She even sympathized when tops would not spin. She generally knew when her children wanted to say something to her, and would wait till it came. She was expecting something about Lancey now, and hoped the question might be easy to answer, but though Don John was thinking about Lancey, it concerned what he himself had lately done for him, and when he spoke at last she was a good deal surprised.

“Oh, mother,” he said, “you don’t know how wicked I often feel.”

She looked down on him, but said nothing, and he went on.

“And I think Mr. Viser is a very odd man—particularly for a clergyman.”

“What have those two things to do with one another, my dear boy,” she answered.

“Oh, a great deal,” answered Don John. “But you know, mother, you are the soul of honour.”

“Yes,” she repeated, without smiling, “I am the soul of honour.”

She meant that when things were confided to her by her children she always kept them strictly to herself. Sometimes the confidence related to quarrels, and then she generally managed to persuade the penitent to make them up, or they concerned misdoings, were in the nature of confessions, and she was to tell their father, and persuade him to forgive. They all had a very wholesome fear of their father.

“And you never think of telling.”

“Of course not !”

“I listened to his sermon yesterday—I never used to listen, but I did, and—well, if it’s of no use punishing one’s self, what *is* of

use, you know fathers, and mothers, and masters are always punishing boys.”

“ Yes, they are.”

“ To make them better.”

“ Yes.”

“ But if I had done something horrid—told a good many lies, for instance—and invented a story, which could not be confessed to father so that he could punish me, I think it extremely mean of Mr. Viser to make out that it’s of no use my punishing myself instead.”

The mother did not startle her penitent by asking, “ Have you told a great many lies ? ” She only said, “ And have you punished yourself, my boy ? ”

“ Yes, mother,” he answered, “ and here is the punishment. I did it up more than a week ago, when first we came home for the holidays. It almost choked me when father and you were so pleased with my papers. And you know you talked about trusting me when I was out of your sight, and

feeling sure I should be a good honourable boy. Oh, you know what you said." He produced a small brown-paper parcel. "I meant—meant at first to dig a very deep hole and bury it—but I am afraid I might afterwards not be able to help digging it up again, for that mouse really is such a—"

He paused, and still she did not smile or hurry the penitent, whose hand trembled a little, and who looked rather red and irate, and he presently went on,—

"So whatever Mr. Viser says, you are to take the parcel, mother, and lock it up—and mind, I am never to have it any more."

"Very well, my boy," she answered, not at all as if she was surprised, and asked calmly, "What is there in it?"

"There's all my money that grandmother sent, and my mechanical mouse that runs round and round when it is wound up, and several other things that I like. Now I have punished myself!"

“Yes. Can you repeat Mr. Viser’s text to me?”

“No, not all of it.”

“Get me a Bible.”

Don John fetched a Bible, his wrong against the vicar did not seem less present to him when he had read the verses in question, the beautiful and well-known verses beginning “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord,” and ending, “Hear ye the Rod, and who hath appointed it.”

“You see it is all in the Bible,” she observed; “and what did he say it meant, but that we must not think we can please or propitiate God by depriving ourselves of our goods, or even of any earthly thing, though we love it best. Not to punish yourself, but to confess your sin and forsake it, is the way to obtain forgiveness.”

“Yes, but I did say that I could not confess this; that would be worse than doing it. I cannot tell the real thing, the thing of consequence, but I can tell you a little more, and you will be sorry.”

“Yes, I shall—tell me as much as you can.”

“What I said to father when he questioned me about how I broke my arm, and when I did it, was all a lie—all my own invention. I made it up—I am in such a rage sometimes after I go to bed and think about it, that I can hardly help crying. I wish father could punish me for it, and then forgive me, and I should be all right then.”

“But that cannot be unless you confess your fault to him.”

“Oh, mother, I did tell you I could not confess it. So if punishing myself won’t do, I suppose it’s my duty to be miserable about it, when I don’t forget it,” he added with boyish naïveté.

“I dare say Lancey knows,” she next said, and when he made no answer, “Don’t you think he would be glad if you confessed?” she asked.

“Why, of course not, mother,” the boy exclaimed, and then she never doubted that

she should hear the whole ; but no, Don John was very loving, very penitent, yet he stuck to it, that he must not tell her anything more, though when she asked him afterwards whether he had at least confessed his fault to God, he answered, “ Oh, yes,” with a fearlessness that surprised her. She was surprised both that he should have done so, and that he should think nothing of telling her that he had. Like most other boys he was in general extremely shy of all such subjects.

She urged him again to confess his fault to her, and he paused, as if considering the matter. “ As God knows everything,” he began, and then broke off.

“ Yes, my dear boy ? ”

“ And Mr. Viser doesn’t, I shall not take back my mouse.” Here being hard put to it not to smile, she held her peace.

“ When boys are at school,” he went on with a certain quaint simplicity that was natural to him. “ When boys are at school,

it's not at all easy to think about God. But HE knows what I mean. Boys are not so good, mother, as you suppose. If you knew everything just as God does, without my telling you, I should be very glad."

This was all his confidence—childhood was nearly over, not precisely even in that fashion could he ever talk to her again.

It was only Lancey who seemed never to have anything to hide. Seemed—he was such a sweet little fellow, so ready to confess a fault, so apparently open; Donald Johnstone and his wife always felt themselves repaid for the kindness and the love they had shown him, and the family circle appeared to be incomplete unless he was in it. But of course Mrs. Johnstone never asked him anything about Don John, how he broke his arm, and why he was *obliged* to tell lies to his father about it. She would not have been "the soul of honour" if she had done such a thing as that.

CHAPTER X.

THE family circle, as has been explained, never seemed perfect unless Lancey was in it, and this was more true than ever when, after another year, the two boys came home healthy, cheerful, and well-grown.

Lancey had not got himself into a scrape since the memorable stealing of the watch, and consequently both the boys were happier.

A somewhat singular circle it was. The house in Upper Harley Street had been let. The long rambling homestead in the country suited the mistress and the children far better. Her easy household ways often surprised Mr. Viser, her children inherited her placid temper and her unruffled ease.

They were all “characters” already, observed with amusement by the neighbours,

both rich and poor ; at home everywhere, and perfectly independent.

Mr. Viser and his wife, Lady Louisa, had a large, young family, but none of their children, though taken great care of, showed half the strength and spirit of the Johnstones.

Sometimes Lady Louisa came to call on Mrs. Johnstone, and made quiet observations on the manners and fashions of that gentleman, but it did not occur to her that these had anything to do with the sparkling eyes and high health of the children.

Once she had known Mrs. Johnstone to take up a parasol, when a very great noise of shouting and laughter almost deafened them, as they sat in the drawing-room. She went out into the garden, Lady Louisa accompanied her ; the boys and girls were easily found by the said noise.

Were they told to make less ? not at all ; they were merely admonished to go a little further off.

The little Visers never shouted ; they never

went out of doors without a nurse or a governess ; they wore gloves, and generally had parasols.

A buttoned glove ! handcuffs are hardly more powerful to restrain. Such an article was never put on to the little Johnstone girls, unless when they went out in the close carriage to pay calls with their mother, then they had also the regulation quantity of ribbon and feathers, and behaved accordingly.

The groom in that establishment acted as an under-gardener ; he also went out on errands occasionally, but when Mrs. Johnstone ordered the pony-carriage, she never troubled herself to inquire whether he was at home or not. Why ? The boys of course could bring the pony up from the meadow, run out the little carriage, and harness the docile beast as well as he could. And, to be plain with the reader (at the same time hoping not to shock or displease), the girls could too.

When Mrs. Johnstone heard the wheels of the pony-carriage, as it was brought round to the front door, she would step forth equipped for the occasion, and serene as usual. In holiday time she always found one of the two boys ready to drive her; he would have brushed himself up a little, and put on a tolerably good hat.

The carriage had a moderately comfortable seat in front, the back of it was somewhat like an open square box. There was a moveable bench-like seat in it, under which old Die was generally lying, for she liked the air. The white cat was not unfrequently there also (she had followed Don John from school).

“So long as you keep yourself to yourself,” Don John would say, “there’s no objection to your seeing the country.” A third passenger would be Peterkin—old Die’s grandson. She knew why he was brought. He was not to be trusted at home by himself. It was all very well to bark at tramps, “but

Peterkin was such a cad, that he would bark at the honest poor."

The mother and son would then set forth in homely state; but if their errand was to the town they would be sure to overtake Lancey and the elder girls, perhaps Mary and Freddy also, about a mile down the hill. These young people, as a rule, would be arrayed in flapping sun-bonnets and "over-all" garden pinafores, but you perceive "that there would not have been time to 'dress up,' and mother did not mind."

They also had errands to the town, which was about four miles off. A couple would get in behind, when mother told Don John to drive slowly, at the same time nests, and ferns, and flowers would be put in. Some did not attain to the town, but lingered in the lane picking up property till the return journey, then they would perhaps all get on board the somewhat clumsy craft, pulling out the dogs to follow on foot. Sometimes on a sudden they would all get down, excepting

the boy who was driving, and scurry into the little wood on either side, turning in like rabbits.

This was when a farmer's smart phaeton, with the farmer's lady in it, appeared at the top of the hill, or when Mr. Viser and Lady Louisa drove into the lane in their landau.

Such a feeling as shyness was quite alien to their natures, but they felt that their garden pinafores rather disgraced mother, filled as they would be with cowslips, blackberries, or nuts, as the case might be. It was as well, therefore, to make themselves scarce.

Mrs. Johnstone never took any notice of these proceedings. Occasionally Mr. Viser could see flitting figures and bright eyes peeping through the hedge, while the placid and admired mother exchanged civilities with her neighbours ; but, of course, he took no notice, and never looked back ; while the children stole out again, and quietly got into

the carriage without stopping it, as the pony laboured slowly up the hill.

Their purchases were as strange as themselves.

Once he saw a gawky girl, the eldest of the brood, dart into the wood with a good-sized tin kettle in her hand. That kettle, which had cost two and eightpence had, together with a cuckoo clock, exhausted the whole resources of the family, the clock had cost eleven shillings, two shillings of which had been borrowed of mother as an advance upon next week's allowance.

Mother was not fond of advancing money, but this was for a great occasion. These were birthday presents for a particular friend.

Here it is really needful to give some account of the friend, together with certain other friends, their place, and their surroundings.

Within thirty miles of London there is a good deal of rural scenery. If any doubt

this, let them go and look about them—not south of the metropolis, of course, and not west. There are some little towns also with a general air of being old-fashioned and altogether behindhand with the world.

One of these was the little town beyond that long hill that the pony hated and the children liked; because his natural pace as he climbed it enabled them to fling their wildings into the back of the carriage without asking to have it stopped. They generally got out when they came to the steep part, and often, in a chivalrous spirit, gave the lumbering machine an unanimous push behind, while mother took the reins.

Mr. Johnstone had a “clarence,” but this carriage was mainly used for taking him five days in the week to and from the station, which was more than four miles off. His expenses were large, and he had three sons to educate and to provide for, when there should have been but two. But his wife had persuaded him to let their town house

for a term of years, so that it became a source of revenue instead of an expense to him ; and when he found that she enjoyed her quiet life in the country, where there was next to no “neighbourhood,” that she looked more charming and fresh in her country attire than she had done when they mainly lived in London, where her milliner’s bill was six times as high, and that all her children were healthy and happy, he fell back on his old thought that he was the luckiest husband going, and let himself take the same cheerful view of things that she did.

His abode was called “the house,” and about two fields off, with no means of reaching them but a footpath, which led, without any compromise, through his stable-yard, were six cottages called “the houses.” Each of these had a nice plot of vegetable garden at the back, but in front it had scarcely six feet of flower-border, divided from the field by a simple wooden railing, and

having no outlet to any road or lane, and yet this field, a charming field in its way, might almost itself have been thought of as a lane, for it was very long and very narrow, and was divided from its neighbour field by a running brook, edged with hawthorn and maple, and a wasteful tangle of brambles and whitethorn. Very bad farming prevailed in those parts.

In the first of the tenements, dignified by this name "the houses," lived the very particular friends for one of whom the tin kettle and the cuckoo clock had been purchased. Her cottage consisted of a very neat and rather roomy front kitchen, a little washhouse behind, and upstairs two tolerably comfortable bedrooms. By calling, she was a humble dressmaker; she and her sister worked for Lady Louisa's children and servants, made the little Johnstone's common clothes, worked for the farmers' ladies, and did odd jobs generally.

In the next cottage (they were all de-

tached) lived the cobbler. His name was Salisbury. The particular friend's name was Clarboy—Mrs. Clarboy, and she was aunt to the nurse up at the house. The houses were supposed to be Mrs. Johnstone's district; if the people there were ill, it was her special business to look after them; she also lent them books and tracts, and persuaded them to join the parish coal club and go to church.

So far as the young Johnstone's were concerned, these cottages constituted "the neighbourhood;" they frequently went on their own invitation to drink tea with Mrs. Clarboy, who was a widow, and her sister Jenny. They generally trundled the loaf, the cake, the butter, and the tea, they proposed to consume, through the fields in a child's wheelbarrow; frequently they added radishes out of their own little gardens, or some fruit.

If the sisters confessed that their coal was low, the wheelbarrow, after having been duly

emptied, was trundled on to the last cottage, which was called the shop, where there was often as much as a whole sack of potatoes on sale, a matter of three or four "hundred" of coal, gilt images made of gingerbread in the window, bull's-eyes and yellow butter, together with a jar of treacle, with other like dainties, and a moderate allowance of bacon, all of inferior quality and somewhat the worse for keeping. A quarter of a hundred of coals would be purchased, and if the young Johnstones had not the requisite cash to pay at the time, they brought it the next day, but if it was at the beginning of the week, and they had plenty of money, they bought half a hundred and wheeled it to its destination at twice. They then made up a good fire. The sisters had a capital pair of bellows, presented to Miss Jenny by the same young friends on a previous birthday.

They used them liberally. Mrs. Clarboy and Miss Jenny, proud and pleased, looked

on, at the same time continuing to stitch; they never thought of interfering with the preparations.

A great deal of toast was made, sally-lun cakes were buttered, tea set on the hob to "brew," then radishes were washed, and the cloth was laid.

Some of the company sat on Windsor chairs, others on tall stools or boxes set on end, which they had imported from their home.

The hostesses enjoyed their meal to the full as much as their guests. Nothing ever interfered, the sisters never had any other engagements. If they were very busy, the girls helped to hem frills, or were trusted to run seams afterwards, or at least they threaded needles, while the boys made themselves popguns, or disported themselves in or beside the brook, catching caddis-worms, or sailing boats.

Mrs. Johnstone knew all about this?

Certainly.

What a singular woman Mrs. Johnstone must have been !

There was a sweet gentleness about all these children, and an untroubled air of quaint independence.

Where, indeed, was their governess ?

Why, she was at her lodgings in the nearest farm-house, where she spent her evenings, and where she slept.

It was as much to her enfranchisement as theirs ; but very few mothers would have deliberately banished her, and undertaken herself all the supervision required between five o'clock one day and nine o'clock the next.

It made the governess—a very good woman—extremely happy ; it gave an early sense of responsibility to the children, for if they got into any scrape, or perpetrated any mischief, they were expected to go and tell, which they did.

Lady Louisa called one evening when they were present. She only stayed a minute.

“We’ve come to tea,” the company told her.

Mrs. Clarboy, rising, coloured and curtseyed.

Lady Louisa did not look or express the least surprise. She had several small books nicely bound in her basket, and she said,—

“Mrs. Clarboy, the Rector has had his course of Easter sermons published, and he wishes me to present you with a copy.”

Miss Jenny was a Methodist, so to her Lady Louisa merely bowed.

She then took her leave and went on to the next cottage.

Mrs. Clarboy, a shrewd, industrious woman, more than sixty years of age, was rather silent after Lady Louisa’s visit. She was in the habit of going out to work as well as of taking work in. She hoped her entertainment of the party would not stand in her light as regarded work at the rectory.

Could Lady Louisa disapprove? Well,

though it might be a liberty to think it, what business was it of hers ?

Mrs. Clarboy took up her needle again with great vigour the moment tea was over, the Methodist sister having first said a long grace, expressive of fervent thanks for the meal. She said just the same grace when the two sisters had only partaken of stale bread and the weakest of tea with no milk in it, but she imparted to the words on these occasions an unconscious fervour.

“ You had need not overdo yourself to-night,” she remarked, “ for you’re going to the Hall Farm to work to-morrow.”

“ Yes, I had need,” answered Mrs. Clarboy ; “ for they look to it there that they get their money’s worth out of me.”

“ Isn’t it very amusing, Mrs. Clarboy, dear, going to so many different houses ? ” asked Lancey.

Lancey was waxing Mrs. Clarboy’s thread.

“ Well, Master Lancey, yes, I may say it is. Not but what two shillings a day is

harder earned working out than working in ; but you must count in, the exper'ence you get of life. You see the world. As I often say to Jenny, 'Jenny,' I say, 'what should I be now if I had never seen the world, and what would you be either ; not that you go out, my pore girl ! you hav'n't the nerve for it.' "

Miss Jenny assented by rather a foolish simper.

"Nobody can never be dull," she remarked, "with such an one as sister to talk to, as we sit and sew. She's better by half than any printed book that *I* ever had the reading of."

Don John, sitting cross-legged on the floor, was laboriously threading needles. It took him nearly as much time to perform this operation as it did the two sisters to work up the thread. The little girls were elaborately hemming the frills for the sleeve of a kitchen-maid's new gown, which was to be finished and taken home that night.

“ But I look for no thanks—let the fit be as good as it may—from that sort of customer,” observed Mrs. Clarboy. “ It’s your ma that’s the lady to say she’s pleased or she’s satisfied. To be sure that best—bed furniture I put up for her after it had been calendered was the intricateest thing I ever got the better of.”

“ But then you had your reward,” said Miss Jenny, simpering; “ the head housemaid showed you the drawing-room while the family was at dinner.”

“ She did, Jenny; and I’ve wished times and again you could see it, so frequently as you complain that you can’t make a picture to yourself of what heaven’s like. But you hav’n’t the nerve to go up to the house. You’ll have to wait. It might be an advantage to you though, if you could see it.”

“ Do you think it so very pretty, then, Mrs. Clarboy, dear ? ”

“ Pretty ain’t the word, Miss Majorie. It fairly made the tears start, so full of great

looking-glasses, and gilding, and silk hangings. I felt quite solemn. I said at the time, 'It makes me think of heaven;' so clean, too, and so cheerful."

"I know heaven's not a bit like that," observed Don John, with conviction, at the same time handing up another needle, the thread of which, from much handling, was not quite so clean as it should have been.

"Well, and you may be right, sir," answered Mrs. Clarboy, with due gravity; "and the Scripture says, as we all know, 'eye hath not seen.' And yet it stands to reason that very beautiful things and places must be more like than such as are not beautiful at all."

The company were not able to give an opinion here; but they were not much surprised at what they had heard, being already accustomed to look at things through other eyes, and different points of view from those of their own class.

“There’s not much to see at the Hall Farm,” said Miss Jenny.

“But to them that can take notice,” observed Mrs. Clarboy, “it’s all interesting; it shows one people’s ways. I know what it is to have two candles as good as whole ones all to myself, and I know what it is to have to share the end of a dip with two others working by me.”

“You like as well as anything working at the Red Farm,” observed Miss Jenny, “where you sit in the kitchen with the mistress. There’s plenty to hear there, if there isn’t much to see.”

“Ay, I’ve worked for three generations of the Hollyoakes.”

“He was one to argue, was the old Mr. Hollyoake,” proceeded Miss Jenny; “you always said so. Why, he would argue even with a ghost!”

“Ay, but you’ve no call to talk of ghosts now,” said Mrs. Clarboy. “You’ve not an ounce of discretion in your whole body, Jenny.”

“ You mean because of us,” said Marjorie ;
“ but we often play at ghosts at home, Mrs.
Clarboy, and father and mother don’t
mind.”

“ Are you sure, miss ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! and we often go to the Poly-
technic and see the ghosts—real ones, you
know.”

“ Oh, well, miss, I was not aware. Well,
as Jenny was saying, old Jem Hollyoake was
so given up to arguing, that he would argue
even with a ghost. He had brought up his
brother’s son. The lad died, and his ghost
rose, got into the kitchen, and pointed his
long finger at his uncle.

“ ‘ Uncle Jem,’ said the ghost, ‘ as you
brought me up—’

“ ‘ Bring you up, did I ? ’ interrupted old
Hollyoake, beginning at once. ‘ Bring you
up, did I ? Little enough of that you needed ;
it was impossible to keep you down ! ’

“ ‘ I mean,’ said the ghost, obliged to ex-
plain himself, ‘ as you’ve brought me up to
speak with you out of the silent tomb.’

“ ‘I did nothing of the sort,’ says Mr. Hollyoake, very much frightened.

“ ‘You did,’ said the ghost.

“ ‘The family was gone to bed, but I dare say old Jem had drunk enough to keep his courage up, and argue he would.

“ ‘How dare you tell such a falsehood,’ said he. ‘I wish nothing more heartily than that you would keep in your proper place. Isn’t your headstone to your mind?’

“ ‘Yes,’ said the ghost, ‘it’s a real handsome one. But, Uncle Jem, you’ve brought me up by for ever thinking and thinking about those seven silver spoons you’ve lost. *I took them!*’

“ ‘Mr. Hollyoake said he was sorry, and the ghost went on,—

“ ‘They’re at the bottom of the least of the two old hair trunks in the garret, hid under my velveteen coat.’ Then he vanished.”

“ ‘Are you sure the ghost said all that?’

“ ‘Yes, Master Lancey. But you’ll think it strange that when, the next morning, old

Hollyoake related all this, and got some of the neighbours to go with him into the garret, they found the trunk and the old coat in it ; but the spoons were not there."

"Not there ?"

"No."

"Then I don't believe the story !"

"Why not, sir ? Oh, you may depend it's true. It was a story against himself, and how disrespectful he'd been arguing with the ghost."

"You said he was alone when the ghost rose ?"

"Yes, sir, smoking his pipe in his own kitchen."

"He must have been dreaming !"

"Oh no, sir, not he, the kitchen is tiled. Why, he has shown me many a time the very tile the ghost stood upon. It was a yellow one—all the others are red. The tile is there to this day !"

"Well, ghosts are mere bubbles," observed Don John, repeating something that he had heard at the Polytechnic.

“No, sir, the man was most like a bubble here,” said Mrs. Clarboy, “for he broke, and never paid but two and eleven-pence in the pound, whereby we got no more than that for making the mourning his wife stood upright in when she cried at the ghost’s funeral.”

Here the story ended. The young Johnstones pondered over it with deep interest and attention, as something that would do capitally to act. They were fond of play-room theatricals, but thanks to the Polytechnic they were, so far as ghosts went, perfectly fear-proof.

“Oh, mother,” said Lancey, when they got home, “Mrs. Clarboy told us such a jolly ghost story. Will you come into the play-room to tea to-morrow and see us act it?”

“You should not have asked mother in that unconventional way,” said Naomi, “when you know we planned to send a proper note on pink paper, and paint a monogram for it.”

“Oh well, I think it had better be considered then that I know nothing about the tea at present,” said the mother.

Naomi was mollified.

“And, mother,” said Don John, “may we have two more chairs for the play-room? I told you last week that we had got a Fetch.”

“And I did not know what you meant, Don John.”

“Why, mother, you must have noticed that when droll or ridiculous anecdotes are invented for the papers, or told in books, they are often palmed off on people who had nothing to do with them. Well we have invented two characters. We act them. And we palm off our funny things that we say upon them. They are Fetches of our own imagination, mother.”

“What do they want with chairs, then?”

“Now, mother, it’s not fair to laugh. Why, we have a *séance* twice a week; we keep minutes of it. Our Fetch is frequently called

to the chair, so we want one, to pretend that he is in it."

"Ah, I see."

"Robert Fetch Fetch, Esq.; that's his name. We have pretended a large house for him in the rectory glebe. It seems quite odd to go there and find nothing in it. And Fanny Fetch is his old cousin, who lives with him."

"And you want a chair for her, too?"

"Oh, yes, that we may know where she is sitting. Of course their chairs will not appear to us to be empty. When we act them and do their voices, you cannot think how real they seem."

"You'll come and hear the *séance* sometimes, won't you, mother?" asked Naomi.

"Certainly."

"You'll like them much better than our charades; for sometimes, you know, you think those are rather long."

"I have thought so once or twice when they lasted more than an hour."

“ Well, it takes a long time to dress up ; but mayn’t we have the two chairs ? It’s very awkward for our Fetches to have to sit upon stools.”

“ You may take two chairs out of the blue bedroom.”

“ Oh, thank you, mother ; and you shall see every bit of the ghost acted before tea,” cried Lancey, with effusive gratitude.

He wagged his longest finger.

“ It’s a jolly one. ‘ *Uncle Jem, as you’ve brought me up* ’—mind I’m to do the ghost, Naomi. ‘ *Uncle Jem, as you’ve brought me up.* ’ ”

Here Lancey, delighted at the prospect, turned head over heels, and the young people shortly departed together.

CHAPTER XI.

SHORTLY before the boys were sent off again to school, Mr. and Mrs. Johnstone went over to Normandy to be present on an interesting occasion. Mrs. O'Grady married again. She married a somewhat impecunious military man, and forthwith proceeded with him to India.

Her one little girl, Charlotte by name, had been brought up near Dublin, but had lately come home to her mother; her paternal grandmother, who had taken charge of her, having died. She was pretty, very clever, very awkward, and extremely shy. Quite different from most girls of her age, and keenly conscious of it.

She had never been accustomed to the society of boys and girls of her own age,

and when she heard that she was to go back with her uncle and aunt, and be educated with her cousins, she wept with shyness and a sense of disadvantage.

Her behaviour when first she appeared in the play-room was so stiff, her discomfort was so evident, that she made the young Johnstones feel almost as ill at ease as herself.

As for Don John, at first he almost hated her. Boys are extremely intolerant of awkwardness and causeless fear. But in a short time what kindness he had in his heart was touched for Charlotte, and while he scolded he roughly encouraged her.

“ Now then, Charlotte, hold up your head. What are you so shy about ? ”

“ I can't help it, indeed ; it won't go off, Don John.”

“ Won't it ? Well we can't stand this much longer. Do you think it would go off I gave you a good shaking ? ”

“ No-o.”

“ Suppose I try ? ”

He advanced ; they were in the garden. Charlotte, taking all for sober earnest, turned, and, fleet of foot as a fawn, darted along the grass walk and across the first field, he after her whooping, and with all the Johnstones at his heels.

She reached the brook ; he was gaining on her, he was close behind. She checked herself for an instant on the edge, gave a shriek, made a spring, and instead of clearing it, splashed into its very midst.

Astonishment, and the water bubbling about her, brought her instantly to a dead pause. Then she heard shouts of laughter behind her. She turned cautiously round, and when she saw Don John gaping at her in dismay on the bank, and all the others laughing, she could not help laughing too.

“ Keep as still as ever you can ! ” shouted Lancey, as he came up breathless. “ Well, I don’t know whether this was most *funky* or most *plucky* ! ”

Charlotte by no means wanted courage, and shyness could not stand against such an adventure as this. The water was almost up to her shoulders, and it was not without some difficulty, and the help of the cobbler's—Mr. Salisbury's,—bench that she was extricated, for she was standing on a little shoal, and the water was deep on either side of her.

Breathless was the interest of the folk from "the houses," while Charlotte, dripping and blushing, was taken to Mrs. Clarboy's house. Marjorie having rushed home for the nurse, that functionary soon appeared with dry clothing, and Charlotte was arrayed in it.

When she appeared outside, Don John met her looking very sheepish, but instead of apologizing, he said bluntly,—

"You're not to do that again; it's more horrid of you even than being shy. I was only in fun."

“ I shall not do that again, unless *you* do that again,” said Charlotte, not without a certain audacity ; for she was still excited and her shyness for the moment was gone.

She shook back her thick black hair. She was a pretty little girl ; but Don John cared not for her good looks, for the lustre of her dark blue eyes, and the soft carnation flush which had spread itself over her small oval face.

“ Well, let’s be friends,” said Don John bluntly ; “ you know it was hateful of you to be so shy.”

“ Yes,” said Charlotte, “ I know it was.”

“ If you’ll be nice to us,” he continued, with a sudden burst of generosity, “ I’ll let you write the minutes of our society, and tell you all about our Fetches.”

Hints of the Fetches had reached Charlotte. She was devoured with curiosity about them.

“Come! I don’t like writing, and you can write so fast.”

He held out his hand as a token of forgiveness. She was the culprit, of course. Charlotte looked at matters in the same light.

The minutes of our society. These were fine words; they meant the meagre and badly-spelt notes, written in ruled copy-books, of these children’s fantastic doings.

Charlotte held out her hand, and amity was proclaimed then and there.

The little girl was now at her ease with this especial company, and did not know that the desired state of things had not come about by any resolution of her own, but only through accidental circumstances.

Poor little Charlotte! She was more utterly at home and at ease than most people with those whom she did fully know and love; but she had a fresh access of shyness with every stranger, every visitor,

and even every new housemaid that appeared on the narrow scene of her life. If she went to drink tea with the young Visers, she made herself ridiculous by her stammering and her blushes ; if a farmer's lady made a polite remark on meeting her in a lane, she left the Johnstones to answer it and retreated behind them, flushing furiously.

Sometimes, as time went on, and she was more shy than ever, she would say it was hard when her cousins laughed at her.

"Then you shouldn't write verses, Charlotte. Only think of a girl of your age writing verses," observed Marjorie on one such occasion.

"It can't be that," answered the poor little victim, drying her eyes.

"Oh yes, it is," said Don John, with youthful certainty and inconsequence. "Father says it's the poetical temperament that makes you so shy."

"But I've tried to leave off writing my

poetry, and it makes no difference," said Charlotte, choking a sob ; " I haven't written any for a fortnight."

" And those verses she did for poor Peterkin's epitaph were perfectly stunning," observed Lancey.

Charlotte was consoled.

" And mother says she thinks it's extremely interesting to have the poetical temperament," remarked Naomi, the second girl.

" So now, Charlotte, don't be mooney ; set off !—proceed !—go it !—and finish the minutes. Don't you know that Fetch is coming to tea—and mother," exclaimed Don John.

Don John and Lancey were now fourteen years old, Marjorie was nearly sixteen, and Naomi fifteen. But the two boys were quite at the head of the family—bigger, stronger, cleverer, and bolder than the sisters, they reigned over all, especially

over Charlotte, though she alone had the touch of genius, which guided their fancies and suggested their most amusing play.

The boys were just come home for the midsummer holidays, and had been to pay a short call at the houses.

There was poor Mrs. Appleby, who was a cripple, and lived with her daughter; to these patient women they took some tea, and a little shawl, bought with their own money. Then they paid their respects to Mr. Salisbury and his wife, and were astonished to find the cobbler at work in his little back kitchen, and the front room with a new square of carpet spread over its brick floor, a sofa with a soft puffy seat, some new chairs, smartly covered with rep, and a good-size looking-glass; while, standing on a small wicker-table, was a lady's work-basket lined with quilted satin, and filled with odds and ends of coloured threads.

Mrs. Salisbury answered the door when

they knocked. She had on a clean gown and a white apron.

“Glad to see you, young ladies, and you, Master Lancey, and you, Master Don John. Salisbury and me we have promoted ourselves into the wash’us.”

Mrs. Salisbury looked a little confused.

“We’ve got a lodger,” she continued, “that is out at the present time.”

“But who might be coming back,” said Marjorie instantly, feeling that to come in might be to intrude. So the boys, having been assured by Mrs. Salisbury that they “were so growed as never was,” proceeded with their sisters and Charlotte to Mrs. Clarboy’s cottage.

“Fine doings, young ladies, and gentlemen, at Salisbury’s,” exclaimed Mrs. Clarboy, when the usual greetings had been exchanged. “You’ve heard of the lady, no doubt.”

“What lady, Mrs. Clarboy?”

"It's a very 'sterious thing," began Miss Jenny, quite solemnly.

"Ah! you may say that, my pore girl! Jenny has had a shaking of the nerves lately, pore thing; but a truer word she never said, Mr. Don John, than that as has just passed her lips. There's a lady come to lodge here! She have our front bedroom all to herself (and put in the best of new furniture); and eight shillings and sixpence a week paid regular she has promised us for it. And she has Salisbury's front room for her parlour. And it's a 'sterious thing."

"She came in yesterday was a week," observed Jenny.

"And," said Mrs. Clarboy, "I told her truly when first she walked up to the door, and asked if we had lodgings to let, 'No, ma'am,' said I, 'not for a lady like you.' 'It's not what I've been used to, I'll allow,' she said, rather high, 'but I feel as

if I should take to this quiet place ; and I've seen the world, so I can make allowance.' She was all in silks and satins, and had a long gold chain, and a gold watch ! ' Why, ma'am,' said I, ' just look round. There's not so much as a high road to look out of the window at, and see the carts, and carriages, and what not pass, when you're dull. A narrow field and a few bramble bushes are all very well for poor folks, such as we, to have for a prospect. But you, that I make no doubt might lodge in the best street of the town ! Besides,' said I, ' we've no accommodation.' She didn't seem convinced, but she went on to Salisbury's, and there they said the same thing."

" But I think I would rather be in these houses than in the town," said Marjorie.

" There now ! " cried Miss Jenny, and shook her head as much as to say ' they none of them have any sense these gentlefolk.'

A great deal of folding and measuring of flounces followed; the girls lent their aid; but when all was set in order, and the sisters could take up their needles again, Mrs. Clarboy resumed the subject so much in her thoughts.

“Jenny, pore girl, has seen little of life, to be sure, and her nerves are not strong, so she is not to be judged (she pronounced this word jedged) like other folks that have had exper’ence. I went out to work next day. When I came home she said—you did, didn’t you, Jenny?—she said, ‘Often do I pray against the fear of the world, but I’m afraid the love of the world and the handsome things in it has got the better of me this day. Elizabeth,’ she said, ‘the lady has been here again, and I was that dazzled with her beautiful gown, made of the best corded silk, and her things in general (and the picture of a gentleman hung round her neck); but though you

had said our place was too humble for such as she, I took her upstairs when she told me, and showed her our front bedroom.' ”

“ Yes, that was what I said,” Miss Jenny answered. “ Only I didn't lay it all out so straight on end as you can, sister, and I went on to her, as was my duty ; I said, ‘ It's a poor place, ma'am, for such as you.’ ‘ I think, Miss Jenny,’ she says, ‘ if you and your sister was to sleep in the back room, and put some new furniture in here, it would do for me very well.’ ”

“ And here she is,” said Mrs. Clarboy, cutting the story short, for she observed that it did not much interest her young visitors.

“ But I hope it's not wronging her to take the eight shillings and sixpence a week,” continued Miss Jenny, who for the moment was irrepressible, “ being as it is so much more than our whole rent. And it's strange and worldly to come down of a

weekday morning as she does in a silk and cashmere costume almost as good as new."

"That's nothing to us," said Mrs. Clar-boy, austerely, and the young people took their leave. They could not stay to tea, they said, their mother was going to drink tea with them in the playroom, and they must go back at once to receive her.

But Don John had spent the morning at the town, and had not come home in time for the early dinner; his noontide refection had been limited to two buns, he was therefore about to have a "meat tea," with the addition of gooseberry pie and beer.

"You here?" exclaimed Lancey, when he and Don John entered the playroom, and he saw Mary and Freddy seated in a corner with all humility.

"No, you can't stay, you must slope!" proceeded the other young despot. "Didn't we tell you, you might make the raspberry wine in the nursery?"

“But we don’t see any fun in that.”

“Oh, you don’t! Well, now, I wish you would do something really useful for me.”

“Yes, we will, Don John.”

“Take two or three matches out into the garden, and strike a light, that you may see whether the sunshine’s of the right sort. If it is, bring me word.”

“We wanted to hear you do Sam Weller.”

“Don’t sniff,” proceeded Lancey.

“And the cake smells so good,” continued Mary, in a piteous tone, and twinkling away a tear.

“Oh, the cake!” exclaimed Don John. “Yes, my young friends, that’s fair. Now then, ‘share and share alike,’ as the tiger said to the washerwoman; ‘you shall mangle the skirts and I the bodies.’”

“That’s meant for Sam Weller,” Lancey exclaimed. “Now you’ve heard him!”

“Pass a knife,” proceeded Don John.

The little sister handed him a handsome ivory paper-knife. Don John was wroth.

“What! my prize—my carved knife that father gave me? Well,” he continued, falling into thought, “‘I don’t see that it can be put to a better use,’ as the Queen said in the kitchen at Balmoral, when she stirred up the porridge with her sceptre.”

“And there’s no other knife,” said Freddy humbly.

“And,” Mary put in, “we’ve often seen you cut with this one yourself.”

Don John was feeling the edge of the knife.

“That’s nothing,” he answered uttering a great truth without perceiving its importance, “things are perfectly different, and are always reckoned so according to the person who does them.”

He dug the knife into the cake, and carved out a handsome quarter. But just

as the operation seemed about to terminate successfully, a hard piece of citron got in the way. A portentous crack was heard, and the heft broke off short in his hand.

The little brother and sister seized their share and immediately took themselves off. Under the circumstances, how could they hope to be tolerated in the playroom any longer? The company set chairs, Lancey nicked out more portions of cake with his pocket-knife, and then they bethought themselves of ringing for what they wanted.

When Mrs. Johnstone made her appearance, the paper-knife had been put away and forgotten. Don John was pouring out a glass of beer, and saying,—

“ ‘I like my drink frothed, and plenty of it,’ as the porpoise said in the storm.”

Then, when the foam disappeared with mortifying rapidity, he went on in more natural fashion,—

“Oh, mother, don’t you think father

might let us have the beer a little less *powerfully* weak? It really reminds me of the old story he told me himself, that the proper way to make small beer was to tie an ear of barley to a duck's tail, whip it round the pond with a bunch of hops, and serve out the liquor. No, mother, you are to sit at the head of the table opposite to me. That chair is Fetch's seat."

"Is he here?" asked Mrs. Johnstone.

"Not yet, mother; he was here yesterday," said Lancey, "and Fanny drove over in the pony chaise to convey him home. 'Oh, Rob,' she said—his Christian name is Robert—(here Lancey fell into a soft, foolish tone), 'I left your boots at Salisbury's to be patched. He certainly is an ugly fellow; I little expected ever to see him, though I have heard of Salisbury plain all my life. And I have yet to learn, my dears, why they call him Salisbury plain, instead of plain Salisbury.'"

“And then,” said Charlotte, “Fetch told us this anecdote, and said we were to enter it on the minutes. Three men, after a hot day’s work in the hay-fields, got very drunk; their names were Miller, Wright, and Watt. When their wives came to fetch them home they had tumbled down in a heap, and were fast asleep on the hay. Wright’s wife said, ‘Wright’s wrong.’ Miller’s wife said, ‘My man’s so jumbled up with the others, that I don’t know which is which,’ and Watt’s wife said, ‘I don’t mind which is which, all I care for is what’s Watt.’”

“After that,” observed Marjorie, we had great fun, Lancey did Fetch, and Don John was Sam Weller! He’s generally Sam Weller now.”

“Rather ambitious,” remarked Mrs. Johnstone.

“Yes—we read Charlotte’s epitaph on poor Peterkin, and Sam Weller said, ‘Very

affecting, "I incline to blubber," as the whale said when he was half seas over.' There you see, mother laughed at that quite naturally, and without trying!" exclaimed Naomi. "I told you I was sure it was funny. And then Fanny Fetch interrupted—the stupid thing continually says what has nothing to do with the subject. 'My pretty Rob,'" Naomi simpered, "'if you were to steal a joke, would that be burglary or petty larceny?' There! mother laughed again."

"But I wish Fetch to come," said Mrs. Johnstone; "I like him to be present."

"We can't always make him be here," Lancey explained; "sometimes we have nothing for him to say. But he told some more anecdotes yesterday. He said a man met one Mr. Tooth, and a lady supposed to be his mother. The man said, 'Is that your own tooth, or a false one?' She answered, 'He's both.'"

“ If it’s not a breach of confidence, I should like to know who made Fetch say that ? ”

“ Well, mother, it would be a breach of confidence to tell you her name ; but perhaps I may whisper to you that her initials are C. O’G. Don John was so much pleased with the minutes and her anecdotes, that while she was writing this morning he invented a Sam Weller for her. ‘ You can’t speak to me now, I’m composing,’ as the little boy said when he was making the dirt pie, and sticking it round with barberries.”

“ Oh, here’s Fetch ! ” exclaimed Don John, rising up and shaking hands violently with nothing. “ How d’ye do ?—how d’ye do ? You find us in the midst of our simple meal—consommé de bread and cheese, seed cake au naturel, and small beer à la maître d’hôtel.”

Fetch was then bowed into his seat and introduced to Mrs. Johnstone.

“Having had nothing to eat for some hours, my friend,” said Lancey, as Fetch, “I think I could enjoy a slice of that cake.”

“Good,” said Don John, “that’s quite fair.”

Lancey accordingly began his meal over again; but Mrs. Johnstone proposing that the cake should be served all round, stopped the conversation for a few minutes.

“And now, my friends, *the minutes*. Charlotte get out the book,” said Don John, as Fetch. “I wish to have placed on record an anecdote of my own family that I thought of last night.”

Fetch spoke in a high raised voice, and Don John and Lancey produced it equally well.

“But I wish you were not so proud,” said Charlotte, “always boasting—about something—I’m tired of writing down—about *my* property—*my* family.”

She spoke quite sharply.

“*My* old clothesman—*my* undertaker,” interrupted Don John. “Yes, it’s too true Charlotte, I am proud!”

“The minutes don’t seem natural with so many anecdotes,” persisted Charlotte.

“Well,” said Lancey, as Fetch, “but what am I to say if I can think of nothing else? Don’t be so peppery! Some people are never satisfied. Come! I’ll tell an anecdote about that. I invented it some time ago, but I never got an opportunity to bring it in. There was once a Titan who had the largest hand ever seen. Jupiter proposed to give him a ring. ‘I know it won’t be big enough,’ grumbled the Titan. Jupiter was determined it should. He ordered it to be made as large round as the earth’s orbit. And yet when it was sent home, the Titan declared he couldn’t wear it. He pretended it was too big.”

“Mr. Fetch, I consider your anecdote

very good," said Mrs. Johnstone. "But is it true that you have ever boasted of your undertaker?"

Lancey not being ready, Marjorie answered,—

"It's true, mother, that Fetch signed a paper securing his funeral to a particular undertaker, and he received a small sum down for doing it."

"That shows Fetch's frugal mind," said Don John.

"My cousin Fanny is very saving—very frugal too," said Lancey, as Fetch. "In fact, I often tell her she is even mean. I said to her only yesterday, 'Fanny Fetch, you are so selfish, that if the whole sea was yours, you'd still charge twopence a bucket for salt water.' Mother," continued Lancey in his own character, "the most disagreeable thing about this game is that when we have invented anything funny, we can't find an opportunity to bring it in. Now, Don

John said yesterday, when Freddy was too-tletooing in the garden with his fife and pretending to drill Mary, ‘ I always adored the military, as the young lady-elephant said when she heard her lover trumpeting in the rice swamp.’ But you know if we were to wait for a year, nothing would happen to enable us to bring that in naturally.”

“ I am afraid, my boy, this sorrow of yours is common to all wits ; yet you see you have managed to bring it in ! ”

CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT that lodger.

We often think we are of great importance to certain people ; that they must be thinking of us and our affairs, that they watch our actions and shape their course accordingly. In general it is not so ; we are quite mistaken.

The young Johnstones and Lancey never had any such ideas as regarded the lodger ; never supposed that she walked up and down the little path through the fields between the wood that skirted their garden and “the houses” on purpose to catch a glimpse of them ; never thought that when she was not taking this monotonous exercise, she was often peeping out be-

tween the small damask curtains of her so-called parlour, which had been the cobbler's front kitchen, in case they should pass by ; never thought anything of the kind ; and they too were mistaken. She thought of hardly anything else but of them and their doings, specially of one of them. But through the bushy tangle of the wood they could always see whether she was in the field, and so surely as she was they kept out of the way.

What a bother that lodger is, Don John would say, when he would notice her trailing her fine flounces among the buttercups. She was far too gay to look otherwise than vulgar in such a country solitude, and if there was anything pathetic in her longing to see them, and in their always thwarting her, they did not know it.

Sometimes, if it was hot and she was tired, she would bring out a folding camp-

stool, and sit upon it in the shade of the wood, knitting. She was come from London for the sake of country air, so she said. Nobody at the house thought of inquiring her name, or cared at all about her excepting that the young Johnstones wished her out of their way.

At the houses, when they begged to ask what they should call her, meaning, "What is your name, ma'am?" she answered,—

"You can call me 'the lady.'"

But they did not.

They called her "the lodger."

They all knew in spite of her shining gold watch and chains, and satins, and rings, her handsome silks and her fastidious ways, that she was not what they were pleased to consider a lady, by which they meant, if they had known how to use the English language correctly, a gentlewoman.

Those women who have an undoubted

right to the title of lady, and yet are without that culture, that style, that consideration which would enable them to pass muster as gentlewomen, are always very unpopular among the rustic poor. The lodger, of course, had no right to the title of lady ; and because she wanted to pass for a gentlewoman, which she was not either, they gave her even less than was her due.

She was rich, free with her money, not difficult to please, moderately civil to her hosts ; but they rewarded all this by disparaging comments.

“ She was not a lady born, not she ! She’s not like Mrs. Johnstone ; but she’s well enough, and she pays her way.

But an important day was approaching ; a friend’s birthday.

The young Johnstones collected a quantity of excellent prog, and bought several presents, among others a box-iron and a Brighton reading-lamp.

The two boys were allowed to have the pony-carriage and go into the town in the morning to fetch home these things. "We girls," said Marjorie, half enviously, "are never trusted to drive by ourselves."

"I should think not, indeed!" said Lancey; "girls must always be properly attended," and he ran off into the wood, where the good things were being collected preparatory to being carried off to Mrs. Clarboy's cottage.

"How good they smell," said little Mary. "Chocolate—and O! toffee—and tarts, and muffins; what lots of money you and Lancey have. Oh, Don John, I wish I was a boy!"

Don John as purveyor-general was looking on.

"It's lucky," remarked Lancey, in reply, "that being a girl is not infectious. If I thought I should catch it of you, Mary, I would never come near you or any other girl, any more."

"Of course you wouldn't," said Mary, with conviction.

"But you two little wretches are always thinking about eating," said Lancey, rather contemptuously. "It makes me feel that if we did our duty by you, we should not think of letting you go to these tea-parties.

"Oh, Lancey !"

"Yes, it does ; most likely you'll never be allowed to go to any one but this. Now be off, Button-nose, and you too, Freddy, and fetch the other parcels."

"You are always hard on the kids," said Don John. "I rather like to hear them talk their talk, and play their little rigs in holiday-time."

"But they bother one," said Lancey. "And you really did encourage them yesterday, till there was no bearing their *cheek*."

Then Don John burst forth in these noticeable words,—

“ ‘It’s always a graceful thing to unbend,’ as the goldstick-in-waiting said when he balanced a peppermint-drop on his nose, as he stood behind the queen’s chair.”

“Charlotte,” shouted Lancey, “here! Don John has broken out in a fresh place; come and write this down, and stick it in the minutes.”

“That’s a good one,” said Charlotte, “but I don’t think the goldstick does stand there.

“It doesn’t signify,” said Don John; “every one of you now, who reads the minutes, will be obliged to think of him as if he did!”

“Tell us a Sam Weller, too,” said Button-nose, otherwise Mary, coming back with the parcels.

“We like Sam Weller better than Fetch,” observed Freddy.

“You’re not to interrupt your betters

Charlotte hasn't done writing yet. Yes, I'll tell you one presently about—"

"Yes, Don John, *about*?"

"About something to eat. I am happy to see, Button-nose, that you can blush. When I was in the town this morning, and saw all the shops, the butchers', the bakers', the pastry-cooks', and the rest, I sighed deeply."

"Oh!"

"And said what should we be without these. Man is made of what he eats. 'This is the stuff our heroes are made of,' as the Prince of Wales said when he peeped into the Eton boys' 'sock' shop. Fetch, who was listening, burst into tears and said, 'Alas!'"

"Why, Don John?"

"Because he thought it was so good of the Prince of Wales to take notice that we are made of what we eat, and because he remembered that asses are too."

“Is that all the story?”

“It is; now let the procession be formed.”

Don John marched first, a somewhat thickset boy, broad-shouldered, fair-haired, with light eyebrows and lashes, a martial walk, and a sweet-tempered expression; Lancey came next. They cut across the lodger's path, so that she paused and waited a moment. She looked at Lancey with all her eyes. He was not so big as Don John, he had fine brown hair, pleasant blue eyes, a general air of roguery, and an elastic walk. Lancey was brandishing the box-iron, and singing at the top of his voice. Then came the four girls, all small for their years. Charlotte very pretty, the others not pretty, but sweet and rather graceful; Freddy brought up the rear.

Lancey was rather a handsome boy, the lodger saw his face well for the first time, and a perfectly unreasonable pang shot

through her heart as she observed the utter indifference of his manner towards her. How should it be otherwise. She dragged herself on to Salisbury's cottage, trembling; while Mrs. Clarboy shed tears of pleasure, as peeping through the blinds she saw her guests coming.

She only wiped them away just in time to receive their congratulations.

"Well, and I'm sure I'm obliged to you, young ladies and gentlemen, more than I can say; and to think of you always knowing the very things I should like to buy myself, if I could afford them. You'll stay to tea with Jenny and me, now won't you? It's but a loaf of bread we've got in the house, and a bit of butter."

Mrs. Clarboy always offered hospitality in these words, and always feigned not to see the parcels of eatables till they were actually presented to her.

"Well, I never did! such a noble lot of

cakes, and all so good and acceptable," she exclaimed, "on the present occasion. And there now! I priced that very box-iron yesterday was a week, when Jenny and I walked into the town. You bought it of poor Robinson's widow, now didn't you, sir?"

"Yes," said Lancey; "she was selling off."

"'Ah,' says I to her by way of being neighbourly, for I knew she was going to *settle*, 'I hear Cupid's been at his old tricks again.' 'Yes,' says she, 'I'm going to marry the butcher.'"

With talk like this the time sped till the cloth was laid, and all the good things were set out, and then just as the tea was poured out there was a light tap at the door.

Mrs. Clarboy knew it well, but vexation kept her silent, and Lancey jumping up went and opened the door.

The lodger !

“ I wouldn’t intrude on any account,” said the lodger, a little hurriedly. “ I was only just going to pass upstairs to my room,” and she moved a few steps forward, and then came to a sudden pause, and turned excessively pale.

“ Ma’am,” exclaimed Mrs. Clarboy, “ don’t you feel yourself well ? ”

“ You’re all of a tremble, ma’am,” said Miss Jenny.

“ Oh,” sighed the lodger, “ let me sit down just for a minute.”

A chair was set for her. She was a fat young woman, extremely fair, and now as pale as a lily.

“ If you wouldn’t mind letting me sit a few minutes and taking no notice of me,” she began.

Marjorie in the meantime brought her a cup of tea, and Lancey handed her a biscuit. Even Lancey noticed her face

when she looked up at him, it was full of entreaty, full of love. What does she want? thought the boy. What a bother that she should have come to spoil our fun.

She began to sip her tea, and such a rapture of tenderness made all her nerves thrill and her pulses tingle, that she quite forgot to consider her position as an unbidden guest. Don John sat full in view, with his side towards her. She could look at him at her ease, she felt almost repelled by him, a sense of conscious dislike towards him, as having been the cause—innocent enough, certainly—of a great deal of misery to her made her shrink from his talk, tremble at the sound of his laugh, and feel offended and hurt when Lancey spoke to him.

How familiar Lancey was with them all, commanding and admonishing the two little ones, making fun of the girls, arguing with Don John. “And what a

real young gentleman he is," she felt with tender love and pride. "I could never have brought him up wherever I had put him to school, to talk and to look like that. Oh, that I should long to kiss him, and mayn't; it's hard."

Just as the tea-drinking was all but over, one of the girls said to Mrs. Clarboy that if she had done reading a certain book, which she had lent to her, her mother rather wanted it, and she would take it home.

Then the lodger with somewhat affected flurry was shocked to think that she had got it. She had quite done with it. She would fetch it.

"Don't trouble yourself," said Lancey. "I can go."

"It's on the table, sir, I think, in my parlour," said the lodger.

Lancey and Don John said they were going down first to the brook to look

after a hedgehog, and after that the book should be fetched.

They departed, and went whooping to the brookside, their two dogs after them; and the lodger, quietly rising, went out the back way into the little kitchen-garden and so over the little low fence, not two feet high, which divided this from Salisbury's garden.

She hardly knew what she wanted to do—surely not to say anything to Lancey—no, she thought not. No, it could only be to look at him while he was finding the book. Stop! the Salisbury's were both out, but the least little noise in her parlour warned her that Lancey had already come in. There was a minute window, consisting but of two small panes let into the wall, between the front and back room. A thin muslin curtain was hanging before it. The lodger, trembling with a pleased agitation, stepped up to it,

and through a narrow opening in the muslin looked and saw—what?

At first astonishment made her incredulous. What was he doing?

He was standing almost with his back to her, and gazing, as if fascinated, at a small desk which stood on a table under the window; her keys were dangling from its lock, and it seemed as if he meant to open it.

No, he turned away, took the book, and with a boyish whoop sped to the door, then all in a moment he turned on his heels and—what a sight for her! she saw him go back to the desk,—and turn the key,—and lift it,—and look in.

He dropped the book on the floor, and with his now disengaged hand lifted a little drawer, while he held the desk open with the other. There was a small canvas bag in it. She saw him shut the desk, saw him slip certain gold coins

into his palm, then in one instant return them to the bag which he put in his pocket, and let the desk fall to. Then he darted out of the house, taking the book with him, and leaving the door of her parlour wide open.

She stood trembling, but not now with tenderness so much as with distress.

Through the open door she saw him run down again to the brook; and shocked and amazed, she stepped back again through the garden and into Mrs. Clarboy's house.

She crept in pale as a lily, all her joy and excitement over; she sat down in her former place, and scarcely heard a word that passed about her.

Presently the two boys came in again, Don John had a dog under each arm, Lancey had the book. She looked earnestly at him, as it seemed to Lancey, appealingly. For a moment his guilty mind

appeared to assure him that she must know, and he felt ready to sink into the floor with fright and shame. Oh, to have the last ten minutes over again, and put that money back.

But in another moment his better sense, as he falsely thought, came back to him; it was quite impossible that she could know. He certainly had not been one minute in her room; and he had left her door wide open, so that the inhabitants of six houses had easy access to it.

He was a bad boy, guilty, and utterly unprincipled; but he had not done this out of mere wantonness in theft and greed of gold. No, Lancey knew what it was now to be in bondage to a boy who had found him out, and who was always threatening him with betrayal. He had taken ten sovereigns. To this boy two of them had to go, as the price of his silence. "And if I am suspected," thought poor

Lancey, "but it's not likely, I'll run away."

As the young Johnstones and Lancey retired, the lodger went upstairs to her bedroom, threw herself on her bed, and wept. She knew the door of Salisbury's cottage was wide open, that he and his wife were gone to the town, and were not likely to be back till dusk, and she knew why he, whom she called "her dear boy, her only dear, her precious Lancey," had left it so. He had not only taken the money, but he was more than willing that some innocent person should be accused of the theft.

"Do they keep him so short of money, that he cannot forbear to take mine," was her foolish unreasonable thought. "Oh, I must, I will speak to him now. Tell him I forgive him! Tell him it shall all be his, and I have plenty for us both. Oh, my Lancey, you are breaking my heart!"

The next morning, Mrs. Johnstone sent Lancey over to the town on an errand. What could be more opportune ? He got a post-office order, and sent his young tyrant the two sovereigns. She had given him a shilling and told him to get his lunch there, for he and Don John were to meet Mr. Johnstone at the station, and walk over from it with him. Lancey had three or four hours therefore to spare, and he wandered about in the little town and amused himself as well as he could.

It was market-day ; Lancey, as any other boy might have done, sauntered about in the market, bought a few early jennetings, looked at the gingerbread stall, kept his dog in order, inspected some young dormice, and declined to purchase, saying that he had not enough money. Nobody looking at him would have supposed that he was a boy who had anything on his mind, or that he

dreaded the moment when he was to go home and walk with his adopted father through Salisbury's field.

But that time came at last; Lancey, with Don John, went at the appointed time to the railway-station; Mr. Johnstone, at the expected moment stepped out of a carriage, and they all proceeded home through the field.

And there, just as he turned towards his own house, skirting the wood, the lodger saw them.

He was walking with somewhat of a martial uprightness, coming on steadily and straitforward; Don John walked at his right side, with precisely the same carriage. The two were talking together; Lancey now a step or two in front, now behind, meandered about them with a boyish gait.

“Who is that person?” said Donald

Johnstone, when he caught sight of the trailing skirts.

“Oh, that’s ‘the lodger,’” said Lancey.

“Humph !” said Donald Johnstone.

“Father,” exclaimed Don John, “Salisbury’s house was robbed last night, did you know ?—”

“Robbed !” said Mr. Johnstone, “why I should not have thought the worthy soul possessed anything worth stealing.”

“No ; but it was their lodger’s things that were taken. It seems she left their door open last night, and I think it was open all night, by what I hear.”

Lancey’s terror was intense ; and Don John spoke so coolly that it was evident he had no suspicions.

“It is to be hoped she did not accuse the poor honest people,” said Mr. Johnstone.

“Oh, no. She had left the keys dangling

in her desk ; she felt sure, she said, that nobody in the houses was dishonest."

"That's a queer story," said Donald Johnstone. "Who ever passes there in the night?" and he went marching on ; while she, afraid to turn too sharply out of his path, lest she should attract more observation, came on, hoping he would not look at her.

He would not have done so, but just as they met, both the boys lifted their hats. He had not been aware that they had the slightest acquaintance with this person. He looked up with momentary keenness of attention, the boys, one on each side of him, went on a step or two ; he came to a dead stand, and she saw in a moment that he knew her.

Twelve years' foreign travel, plenty of money, fashionable clothes, had not so much changed Maria Jane Collingwood that she could pass the scrutiny of those

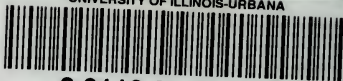
keen eyes unknown. He gave her no greeting of any sort, but after his involuntary pause went on again, and the boys lingering slightly he was soon between them.

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